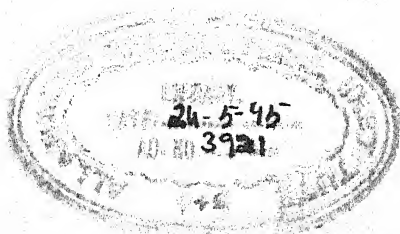


# THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE

BY

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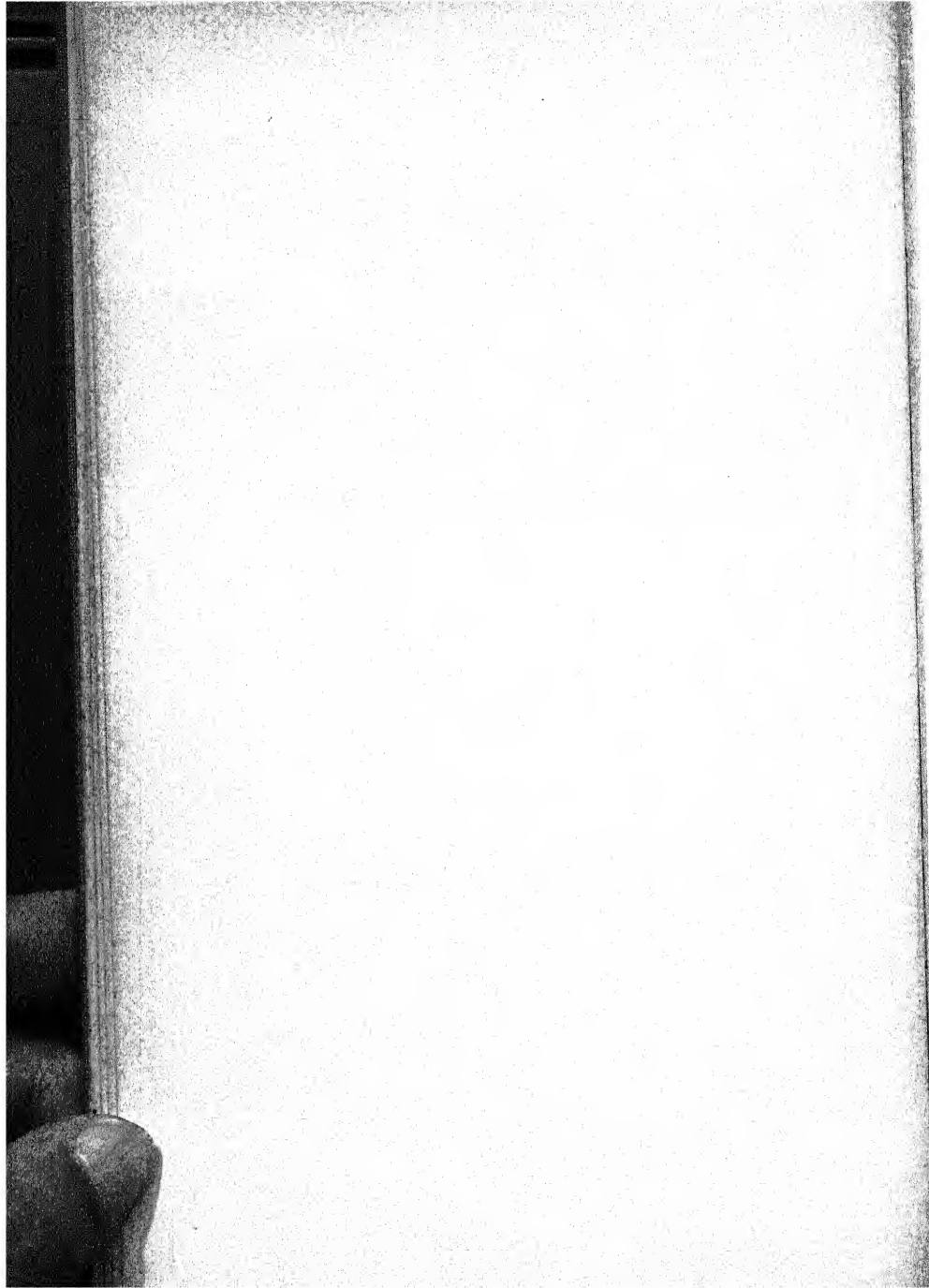
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A

To  
MRS. J. F. MOORS  
*With Gratitude*





## P R E F A C E

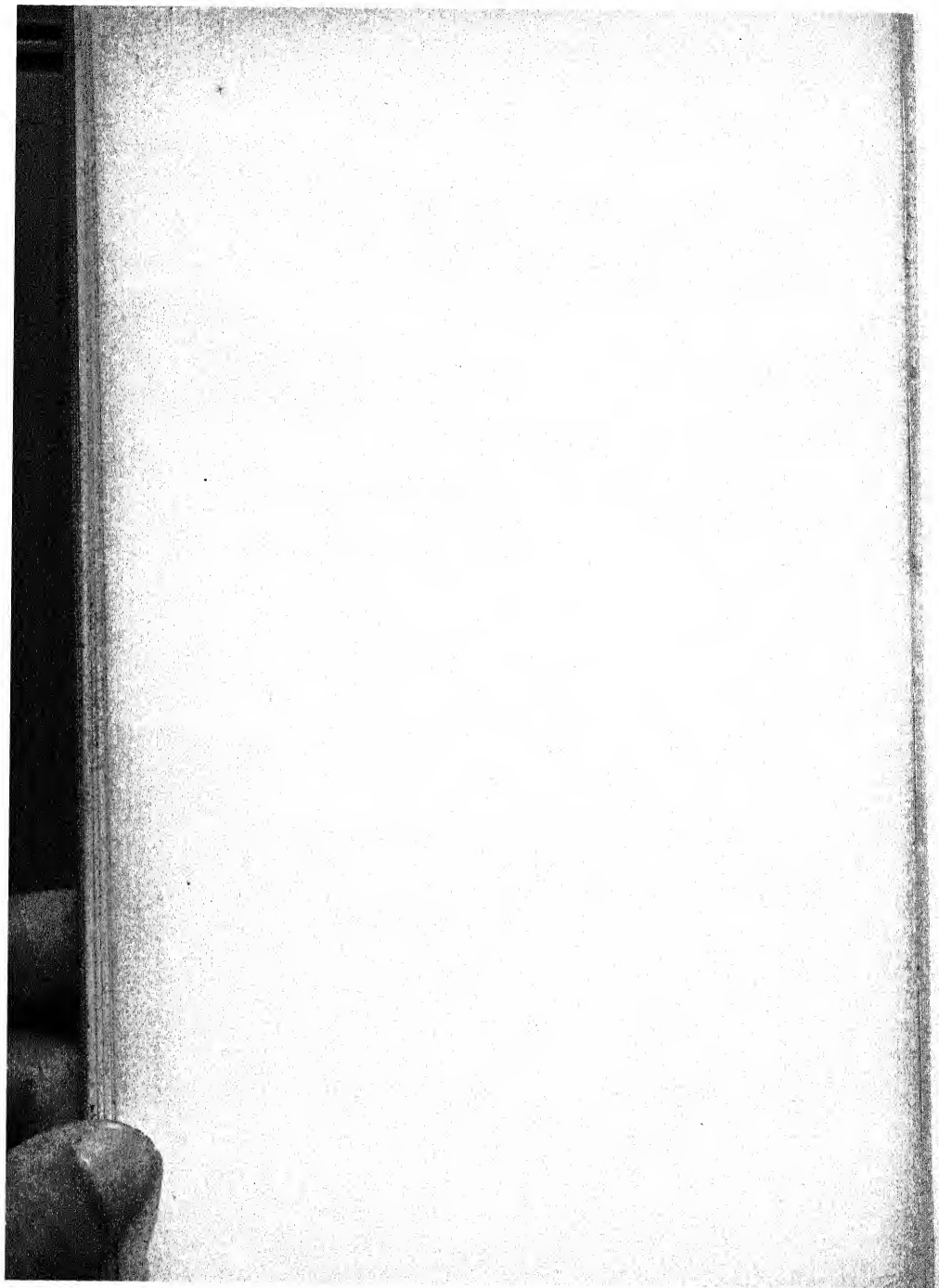
THIS book embodies the substance of various lectures which I was privileged to give this summer to ministers and others responsible for Christian Education,—at the Princeton Seminary Summer School, at the Northfield General Conference and at Chautauqua. It also includes part of the subject-matter of lectures given to Summer Schools arranged by the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, during the month of July.

To attempt to give a brief but comprehensive view of the Christian religion in eight chapters is, of course, to attempt the impossible. I am conscious of glaring omissions. Little is said here about the life of the Church in worship and witness, and nothing at all about the Christian Sacraments which bring the light of the Gospel to a burning focus. In the hope, however, that as a record of the spoken word these pages may be of some interest to those who listened to it with such generous appreciation, I have agreed to the request for publication.

This book appears in England under the title, *This Christian Faith*, with the exception that an additional chapter has been added to the American edition.

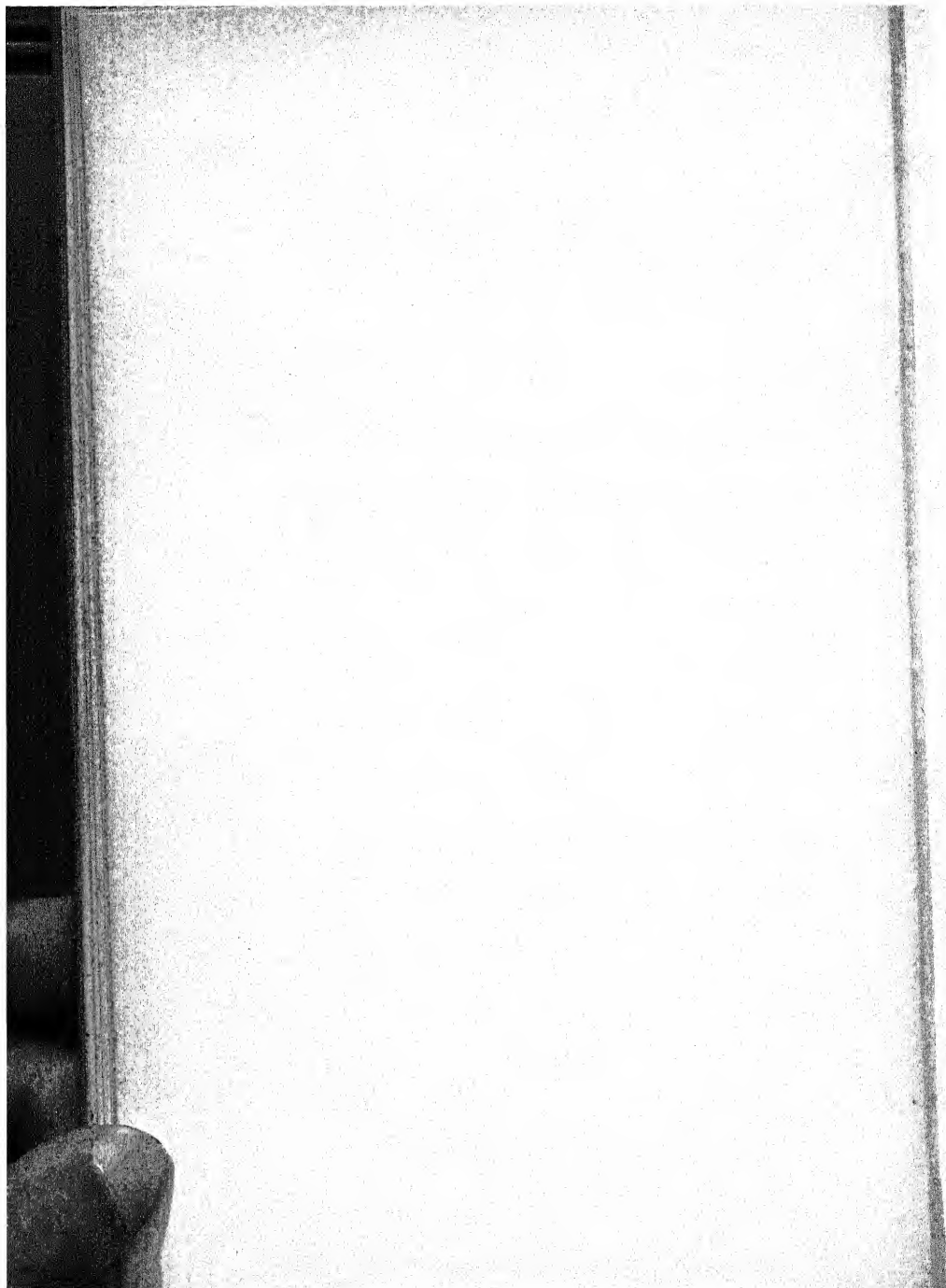
J. S. WHALE.

CHESHUNT COLLEGE LODGE,  
CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND.  
*August, 1938.*



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## PROLOGUE

WHAT is Christianity, and what has it to say and do for the people living down our street? This question is not particularly modern; it is as old as Christendom and has been asked and answered throughout nineteen centuries. But is it seriously relevant to our urgent modern problems and needs, as discussions about finding a job, rearmament or the price of milk obviously are? If not, the plain man will yawn and turn away, and only sentimentalists will blame him.

A hard-headed thinker recently prophesied that unless the world becomes more Christian than it is, it will speedily become less moral than it has been; and we have only to reflect on the lies, brutalities and degradations of our time—the newspapers of the world are full of them every day—to appreciate his point. The nauseating cynicism of international politics, for example, is more than enough to provoke the question: Can men live together as a true community, and can civilization last, save on the basis of faith of some kind? And if not, what faith?

A Prime Minister sees human nature as bare as a pole. When Mr. Baldwin uttered these words, he was speaking not as a pessimist nor as a cynic, but as a realist. My first chapter has to begin there, with the grim fact that the world is wrong, mysteriously and radically wrong. To use the classic language of theology, it is in some sense a 'fallen' world, and the deepest abiding need of the successive generations of men is deliverance. Beautiful phrases about man's inborn goodness, and optimistic dreams of a Utopia of brotherhood and prosperity (as though the Kingdom of God were only another name for some glorious Mutual Improvement Society) look rather foolish before the horrifying depths of evil in this world. Greed is greed, and lust is lust, with all their damning guilt upon them. It is man's age-long predicament that as a moral being he is also a sinner; nothing but redemption will meet his case.

But Suffering and Sin are not our only enemies. The last enemy we all have to meet is Death, inevitable, ruthless and final. Death clinches the fact that there is no absolute meaning, no ultimate reality about this life of time and sense, however rich and varied may be its experiences; its adventures and joys, its heroism and romance; above all, its love. There is a frightful contradiction between the ideals

and achievements of man on the one hand, and that deep humiliation of death on the other hand, which seems to equate him with the animals and the plants. He thinks he was not made to die; has he any right to think so? Has any eternal word of deliverance been spoken to him just at this point, this crucial point?

In the second and third chapters I have to speak of God's answer to this cry of the human heart. There are events in history—and notably one event which for us is the centre of all history—which make it certain that God has visited and redeemed His people. I cannot tell that story in detail here. All that I can say is that in Jesus of Nazareth, that strange Man upon His Cross, multitudes of men have found and still find the amazing wonder of God's forgiveness, and share in the divine victory over pain, sin and death. God's act of deliverance comes, as it were, from Beyond-History, but it is given to us needy men in terms of History. The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus is God's redeeming action, which brings all who accept it with repentance, faith and gratitude into God's eternal kingdom, here and now. The Church, of which we its members are always so lamentably unworthy, is nevertheless the Body of Christ and the marvellous gift of God to this world.





But can the professing followers of Christ be anything but unworthy? Is it humanly possible to be a Christian, and so to fulfil Christ's law of love, in this world which is more like the jungle than the Garden of Eden? The fourth chapter must face the familiar dilemma that Christ makes demands upon us which we can apparently neither obey nor disregard. *Can* a man follow Christ in the hurly-burly of making a living; is it possible to be loyal to Him in business, in politics, on the battlefield, or even in the intimate relationships of the family? Plainly enough, if God is God the Father of us all and if we are called to live together as His sons—the brothers for whom Christ died—we have to seek to do His will. Only in His will can we find peace, both as individuals and as society. But is it credible that God's will can ever be done in this world, perfectly and completely?

This leads inevitably to the fifth chapter on the Life Everlasting. The life of time and sense on this planet can never suffice us; it points beyond itself, since God has set eternity in our hearts. Our citizenship here on earth is a God-given charge, and woe unto us if we refuse to fulfil it; we dare not cease to labour and fight to make this world better for the generations to come. Nevertheless, our hope is set on God, beyond time and death and the fashion



of this world; Christ the risen Redeemer has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Let me repeat: this is not the sentimental and irritating otherworldliness which would stifle your healthy rage against injustice and disease and folly by promising you 'pie in the sky when you die'. God's will is to be done on earth. I am asserting, rather, that belief in eternal life beyond the grave is the very condition of there being any real meaning in the struggling life which we know here.

The sixth chapter will urge our right to believe. Belief is not credulity, a childish game of shutting our eyes and wishing. It means committing ourselves to the fact of Christ with all that it implies, and proving by faith that in Him the promises of God are Yea and Amen.

But commitment to any way of life necessarily involves knowing what that way is. Doing God's will presupposes an answer to a previous question: How can we know the will of God? The seventh chapter faces this old difficulty which is so notoriously acute today. If religion has right and power over us only as it comes to us with self-authenticating authority, where is that authority to be found and how does it express itself? The authority of the Gospel can be convincing and effectual only in terms of history (the Bible), tradition (the Church),

and conscience (the Inner Light). These three facts interlock to form one fact—God's revelation of Himself in His Son which we receive individually by faith as we share in the life of the Church.

The last chapter takes its stand on one of the most baffling parables of Jesus to illustrate what commitment is, and what the religious life is in its essence. Its living heart is prayer, if the 'God about whom the following pages speak is the living God. The Christian life of commitment, witness and service begins, continues and ends as a life of prayer. The secret of religion and of life is fellowship, with God and in God.

## CHAPTER I

### MAN'S IMMEMORIAL NEED

Nor long ago the Crystal Palace was burnt down. A landmark in the sunlight for over eighty years, it is now a wreck of rubble and twisted iron.

People like ourselves, forced to brood over the confusion and madness of the times, could hardly help seeing something symbolic in that vivid crash. It was as though the twentieth century were there making an ironic comment on the optimism of the nineteenth, with its evolutionary idealism, its beautiful phrases about Man and his achievements, and its high-pitched expectations of a Utopia of universal brotherhood and prosperity just over the horizon. Built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crystal Palace was virtually a temple dedicated to the new dogma of inevitable progress: and now its collapse has coincided dramatically with the collapse of the dogma.

For in our realist, post-war world, cheerful slogans about progress sound sentimental and worse. Pro-

gress towards what? Or, for whom? Not for the Spanish peasants of Guernica, surely, nor for Chinamen massacred in Nanking; nor, indeed, for multitudes here and elsewhere, to whom the payment of the rent, the cold and wet of winter, or the getting and keeping of a job of work is one perpetual nightmare. Our faith in ourselves is sadly shaken. The time is out of joint and men know it. They may well ask whether it is *ever* anything else and whether our Christian forefathers were wrong in speaking of this world as a wilderness, a barren land, a realm of bitter things.

In short, all of us know of the breakdown and the disillusionment, the intellectual and even moral chaos spreading throughout our vaunted modern civilization. To urge so notorious a fact would be to thresh straw. It is presupposed in almost every private conversation, at every public meeting and conference, in every newspaper and book about current affairs. Thoughtful people everywhere are asking whether we are not at the end of an epoch, and some even wonder whether this is not the beginning of a new Dark Age.

Those, of course, who are so privileged as to be economically secure may find it easy and comforting to dismiss all this as 'defeatism' (or 'crape-hanging', as I have heard it called in America).

But a growing multitude of serious people cannot be so complacent; they are profoundly suspicious of facile optimism; that bubble burst with the Great War and its aftermath. Indeed, with its four years of physical and moral tragedy and its twenty million dead, the War—which so far from crushing militarism anywhere, seems only to have increased it everywhere—is but one of many stern reminders of man's *abiding* predicament as a moral being, and of the *perpetual* crisis, the *perpetual* slump—so to speak—with which he is faced not only in the great world of affairs, but in his own soul, from the cradle to the grave, and from generation to generation. There is something wrong with man's world; something mysteriously and radically wrong. This is a fallen world, as our Faith—which is realist to the core—has always insisted. To use another classic metaphor, the whole world lieth in the Evil One.

This wrongness of things from which the generations of men seek deliverance is, I suggest, threefold. Man is ever confronted by three enemies—the fact of Evil, the fact of Guilt and the fact of Death. And since the Gospel is the good news of deliverance or redemption from these very facts, we must take a look at them in all their universality and power, if we are really to understand that glorious gospel of

the blessed God which rings through the created universe proclaiming that they no longer have dominion over us.

First, then, there is the mysterious fact of Evil, hindering and ceaselessly menacing all human effort towards good. It seems to be the stubborn accompaniment of all our high aspirations and achievements. For example: the very laboratory research which is defeating disease and is the glory of modern medicine is at the same time threatening civilization with mustard gas. The very invention which enabled a brave and skilful woman to fly the Atlantic, alone, some months ago, was being used at the very same time and with the very same skill to asphyxiate and disembowel defenceless children in Spain. So that the latest glory of modern science seems to involve murder most foul; the one thing, so fine and full of praise to God, has the other thing as its counterpart. Again, the last fifteen years have given us methods of production which can provide a higher standard of living than anything dreamed of in the past; and yet *the* economic phenomenon of our time is the insecurity and soul-destroying idleness of millions. It is almost as if evil has of necessity to grow along with any good which is achieved; as though Nature must threaten and resist man in the very moment of blessing him.



Moreover, there is the same baffling inconsistency in every human life, as it oscillates between the heights and the depths, between unselfish devotion to the ideal and ruthless egotism, between the desire to serve and the lust for power, between a man's inherent neighbourliness and his loveless self-assertion which works havoc in the world.

Here is the real enemy, this mysterious radical wrongness which seems wrought into the very structure of our individual and corporate life.

But why 'mysterious', says someone? Why make a mystery of human greed, vanity and folly? People should just stop being greedy and stupid; and anyhow, this is a matter for education, so why invoke religion to deal with it?

So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind  
Is all the sad world needs.

But that, surely, is a superficial diagnosis of so fearful and universal a disease as moral evil. 'Just the art of being kind' is, plainly enough, just the problem. You might as well say that it is only the art of turning cart-wheels in the back garden which is needed by a youth who is crippled with arthritis. You might as well say that the railway-fare home is all that is needed by a man in a concentration camp.

The fact is that both as individuals and as a society we are somehow in bondage to our self-centredness and our fears. There is, as it were, a famine of love throughout a world which is hungry for it.

What Mephistopheles in *Faust* calls 'the Spirit which ever denies'—that is, the principle of evil which is always saying No to God's everlasting Yea in this universe—this is what the Bible knows as the Enemy, our Adversary, Satan. It is the inexplicable element of frustration, the tragic contradiction in the whole human story, still as real and uncontrollable and dangerous as when the Book of Job wrestled with the same mystery long ago.

And so we are back at the old evangelical truth that sin is somehow 'original' sin; that man's heart is strangely corrupt, and that for human welfare human nature is not enough. We need deliverance and our need is desperate. This is not the mere rhetoric of the preacher, the familiar cliché of the professional exponent of religion; it is hard fact, once again becoming a commonplace. We are again beginning to confess that man is not able to overcome the World by his own powers. Not only is evil a vast and menacing mystery largely beyond his control; there is no evidence that it will be controlled and overcome merely in virtue of the onward march of the evolutionary process. The bland assumption



that moral exhortation will transform the world into the Kingdom of God is blind to the real character of the world—what a modern thinker has described as ‘this daunting mixture of order and confusion, progression and retrogression, achievements and disasters, glories and shames’.

In the second place, and closely involved in the mystery of evil, is the grim fact of guilt which no man's conscience will let him escape. He may not put the blame on the Devil, for example! It may be an insoluble paradox, but it is true beyond cavil that though evil thoughts and deeds seem part of my inmost constitution (like my blood pressure or my temperature), I am nevertheless responsible for them. Though my sin is somehow a constituent part of my actual nature, that is no excuse: my will, rebelling against the claims of God and my neighbours, must take the blame. I am in bondage to false and perverted desires; so are we all; your bondage matches mine and our lives interlock to form a positive network of bonds. Yes, but in the sight of the living God human greed, pride, lust and vanity are what they are, with all their damning guilt upon them. As we stand before the Cross of Christ, for example, we know that they ought not to be, and that any attempt to justify or condone them is clever sophistry and a sham.

Man's inhumanity to man may be as common as, say, the common cold, but he cannot deal with it by taking quinine or going to bed for a day. Sin may be as universal as perspiration or the growth of the beard, but whereas you may dismiss them by mopping your brow and using a razor, you cannot dismiss and forget your deed of shame, your faithlessness to one who loved you, your churlish refusal to help someone in need, your secret pleasure when others have gone wrong, your jealousy, your constant betrayal of truth.

O my offence is rank; it smells to heaven.

Shakespeare means that what's done cannot be undone; there is eternity in it because throughout all eternity anything that has happened can never turn back again into what has not happened. It is there for ever and ever; to the last syllable of recorded time it is there as having happened. Lady Macbeth's desperate whisper is the cry of every burdened conscience:

Out, damned spot! out, I say! . . .

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

I read somewhere recently of a chemical test for blood-stains; so sensitive, that stains on mummies embalmed more than five thousand years ago im-

mediately turn an unmistakable deep blue when Benzidene and Pyridene are applied to them. And no matter how carefully a fabric with a slight stain of blood upon it has been washed and boiled, the 'damned spot' will unfailingly appear under this test.

Guilt has that indelible quality. That is why it is ultimately the central problem of all human life. All efforts to explain it away, to ignore or forget it, are vain. The last word in the spiritual autobiography of all unregenerate souls has to be what it was for St. Paul,

O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me?

Yet this is not all. There is a third fact which all men without exception have to face—the inevitable, ruthless and final fact of Death. The tragic drama of the soul here comes to its climax. Death is the last enemy. Why?

Not merely because it comes last in point of time, but because here the real meaning of the woe and sin of the world is made plain. Death seems to clinch all that has been said about Evil and Guilt. Hope seems doomed at last—hope that there is an eternal right in spite of the brutal triumph of wrong, hope that there is somehow forgiveness and reconciliation in spite of all the irremediable past. For

death is the confirmation of the fact that this life carries no such guarantee—that it lacks just such absolute and eternal meaning. In spite of all the rich and varied adventure of life, and especially the poignant and wonderful experience of human love—death reminds us that we all do fade as a leaf. There is a frightful contradiction between the ideals and achievements of man on the one hand and that deep humiliation of death on the other hand which treats him as it treats animals and plants. He thinks he was not made to die, but has he any right to think so?

‘We should miss you,’ wrote Matthew Arnold, in his playful imaginary conversation with the portly jeweller from Cheapside, who had spoken apprehensively of death. ‘We should miss you for a day or two on the Woodford branch, but the great mundane movement would still go on; the gravel walks of your villa would still be rolled; dividends would still be paid at the bank; omnibuses would still run; there would still be the old crush at the corner of Fenchurch Street.’

That is satire, of course, and a useful reminder that no man is really indispensable; but so far from ignoring our question, it cries aloud for an answer to it. Is there any eternal word of deliverance for the Cheapside jeweller, for the sufferers, for sinners,

for those enduring the agony of bereavement—just at this point, this crucial point where life seems swallowed up in death? Is there any redeeming, revealing word of God to this world, enabling us to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory because death is swallowed up in victory?

One of the stories about the old Greek mathematician Archimedes is that he discovered the principle of the lever. With a fulcrum and an iron bar he showed the King how to move a great weight with very little force, and then said, 'Give me somewhere to stand, and I will move the world'. That is, 'if only there were a standing-place for me and my fulcrum out there in space, beyond this planet, I could move even this planet'.

Let me take Archimedes' famous words as my metaphor. The story of our redemption is the story of how God 'from on high' has moved this world, through a human life, death and victory over the grave. It is the story of power *from the Beyond*, yet *manifested here*, in certain moving events of history. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the mightiest activity of the eternal God in time, forgiving the sin of man at tremendous cost, triumphing over the powers hostile to man, including man's last enemy Death, and bringing the New Age—the power of the eternal world—into this

world of brokenness, corruption and death.

Thus the wonder of the Christian religion is that it brings together eternity and time, heaven and earth, the infinite and the finite, God and Man, into a marvellous unity. The Eternal Word is found in fashion as a man; our robe of flesh and strange infirmity are the garment of the living God. The Christian faith, like Wordsworth's skylark, is 'true to the kindred points of heaven and home'. It asserts the most intimate relation between the eternal reality which is God and the life which you and I live in the market-place or the office, the hospital ward or the kitchen, the factory or the football field, the cradle and the bed of death. Indeed, the great things which belong to our religion have this two-fold aspect and can always be looked at in these two ways.

The Bible, for example, is obviously from one point of view the words of men—Isaiah the poet and statesman, Paul the traveller and Roman citizen, Luke the beloved physician; from the other point of view, the Bible is the Word of God and *the* fount of divine wisdom. Again, the Church is from one point of view a very human society made up of fallible, quarrelsome, cowardly, small-minded men and women; but from the other point of view it is the sacred and mysterious gift of God, the great host



of the redeemed on earth and in heaven, which God loved, which Christ purchased and which the Holy Ghost sanctifies. Once again, the Cross is the supreme illustration of the horror of sin in all human history: sin abounds there. But at the same time it is the supreme occasion and revelation of God's redeeming love: grace still more abounds there. Lastly, Jesus Christ Himself: who is He? He is a Man, sharing fully and perfectly in the conditions of our humanity; the Son of Man. He is at the same time the Son of God; in Him God is personally present to judge and redeem us all. As you read these chapters, I ask you to keep in mind this two-fold aspect of the greatest story in all the world.

Archimedes' famous words meant that even with the longest and biggest lever imaginable the world could be moved only from a point outside and beyond it. Well, using his language as our poor, stammering metaphor, we say two things:

First, evil, guilt and death are such that our efforts to deliver ourselves are vain: salvation comes to us, as it *must* come if it is to come at all, *ab extra*, i.e. from outside ourselves, from the other side of reality, as it were. It is *given* to us as a sheer miracle of revelation, from on high. Christ came *into* humanity; He did not come *out* of it.

But, in the second place, the revelation is made

to us in terms of what we can understand—suffering, sin and death. The unique act of God in human history consists of the words and deeds, the action and the Passion of this Man. To Him we owe everything for our new relation to God. The divine Redeemer took the form of a servant. He who is not *of* history, was nevertheless *in* history. That is what the Incarnation means. It is the heart and pulse-beat of our faith. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.



## CHAPTER II

### CHRIST THE REDEEMER

At a side-show in a country fair you may watch the lightning artist. He will draw you a complete picture with brush or chalk in a few seconds. Yet, strictly speaking, it is not his speed which holds you spellbound, but his clever omission of everything not vital to the picture. Time being all-important, he sticks to bare essentials; a lightning artist is really a man with an eye for what is crucial.

It is no cheap play upon words to say that in any picture of the Gospel, the Cross is crucial. Suppose you had to give a brief answer to the question 'What is the Christian Gospel of Redemption?', what would you say? If your answer had to go into a ten-word telegram, or to be summed up for a dying man in a word, how would you put it? In short, what is it that you could not leave out without radically altering the character and meaning of the picture? The answer, surely, is the Cross. The Son

of God tasted death for every man. He reigns, from the deadly Tree.

In these days, when we rightly emphasize the vast social implications of the Gospel, dwelling much on the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule and asking what Christ would say or do about a slum or a machine-gun, we tend to think of Him almost exclusively—do we not—as the great Teacher, the Prophet of human brotherhood. What if Christ came to Chicago, to Westminster or to the Third Floor Back? So often we want to begin with searching questions like that; we know that they are searching and that a Christian society only betrays Christ anew when it tries to dodge them or to belittle their urgency.

Such questions will always be urgent, of course, because they will always be inescapable. Nevertheless, they are the fruit of the Gospel, not its deep root. Granted that the whole range of human life is Christ's territory, politics and economics, our thinking and our action: granted that there is no corner on earth where His writ does not run and where the thunder of His Word is not heard in all its judgment and redeeming grace: nevertheless, He reigns—not from the politician's platform, nor from the philosopher's desk, nor from the most up-to-date bureau of economic research and social service, but

from the Cross. Lifted up there, He draws all men unto Him. His Cross is crucial not only for the Gospel story, but for history itself.

Look at the earliest life of Jesus, St. Mark's Gospel, and you find that almost one half of it is concerned with His Death. The fact in which the first Christians gloried, and on which they took their stand as they faced and conquered the pagan world, was this scandalous fact of the Cross.

Again, look at history; the Cross is its decisive centre. No man who cares about evidence can doubt or escape the solid fact that something new, different and decisive happened there; that this event in time did change fundamentally the relations between God and Man, and that an era in the history of the race, new in quality and meaning, began there. Even our reckoning of time bears witness to this. The letters B.C. and A.D. are not a mere convenience, an arbitrary device for counting the years. They confirm the Christian conviction that the Cross is the supreme reality of human existence, and therefore—to quote the title of a most moving sermon by John Henry Newman—the 'measure of the world'.

Indeed, if this is not history's decisive centre, where is it? Is there anything decisive in history at all? If the Cross is not its crucial point, how can our human story have any significant pattern or



purpose? The string is broken, the beads scattered, and sheer pessimism has the last word; the story is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. I mean that history ceases to be history if it is merely—to quote the grotesque but expressive phrase—‘one damn thing after another’. If it is nothing more than a catalogue, it is ultimately meaningless. But Jesus Christ on the Cross is too big to be just one more event in a dreary catalogue of unrelated events—one more card in the card-index, as it were! He gives meaning to the whole: the card-index is seen to be a Book, with a Binding; it has a unity of theme and purpose. In what He was and did the history of man and of all individual men finds an absolute and unalterable centre of reference. Through Him alone does ‘1066 and All That’ become historical; in Him alone we see its meaning and ultimate destiny.

Very well; what does this central event of history reveal? Two facts; or, rather, two aspects of one and the same fact, and poles asunder from one another: the one altogether terrible; the other altogether wonderful: the one supremely illustrating what man is and the depths of evil to which he will go down; the other supremely illustrating the deeper depth of God’s holy, atoning, saving love. Here in the unbreakable unity of one historical event

we see two realities, the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the amazing wonder of God's forgiveness. Time has nothing worse, yet nothing better to show, than the Cross. Here, at the darkest point in history, is history's most blinding light. Here, in one and the same context of happenings, deepest depth is also highest height, passion is also action, poison is transformed into antidote, the victory of Satan is—in reality—his defeat. Here where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. I ask you to look steadily with me at this twofold event; there has been nothing like it under the visiting moon.

## I

First, then, the Cross makes actual, as nothing else does or can do, the real nature and meaning of evil in this world. In its defiance to the uttermost of the highest and holiest revelation of God that man has ever known, sin is here 'acted out' in all its naked blasphemy. The picture is unutterably dark.

But why? Because the bare facts are without parallel? No. Even the awful physical sufferings of the Crucifixion were common enough—the scourging which reduced the naked flesh to raw and bleeding strips; the cruel horseplay of the soldiery; the journey to the place appointed for the final,

calculated torture; the driving of great nails through hands and feet into the crossbeam and the shaft; the rude uplifting; the long, excruciating agony; the thirst; the flies on the wounds; the crowd, making a day of it, jeering, sitting down to watch; the soldiers dicing even for the clothes He may no longer have as He hangs above them naked, and pours out His soul unto death.

No; granted that crucifixion is the most terrible and appalling death which man has ever devised for taking vengeance on his fellow man, it is not that in itself which makes Christ's death the darkest deed in all history. Thousands have been crucified, and even on that day there were two others in agony with Him.

Was it, then, the shocking injustice of this undeserved suffering of the innocent, which makes the Cross unique? No. History is eloquent enough of that too, and of much else. Indeed, all the elements which make up this evil picture, except one, are familiar: the blood lust of the fickle crowd; the malevolent cunning of priests and the professionally religious, fearful for their endangered prestige; the cynical prudence of the military governor; the treachery of friends—only fair-weather friends after all; the conscience of one of them molten into silver; another repudiating with curses any knowledge of

the Christ whom he had but recently hailed as the Son of the living God; all of them running away.

As bare fact, all this is not exceptional. Slavery, lynchings, pogroms, broken bodies and broken hearts in all generations, testify that

In every pang that rends the heart  
The Man of Sorrows had a part.

The grief with which He was acquainted was human grief.

Yet, it was far more than that; and here we are at the heart of this matter. He who died there was Incarnate Righteousness and Love; no less. They tortured and destroyed Him—the Prince of human life. He was more than man and knew that He was more: if language means anything, His language about Himself unquestionably implied unique oneness with God, a unique moral authority over men, a unique ministry of salvation towards them, a unique mastery over the powers of evil. Here was One in whose presence men felt the presence of God. He spake as never man spake. He lived as no man has ever lived. He had unveiled to wayfaring people like ourselves not only their failure and sin, but God's forgiveness; He had brought nigh unto them in His words and works the mercy and peace of God's Kingdom. But they crucified Him; even



Him. The Incarnate Word was nailed to a gallows. You and I live in a world so wrong in relation to God, that Calvary is the fate of Jesus of Nazareth. Sin, our sin, is seen at its worst, seen for what it is, where it kills the Son of God. This is 'absolute zero', the very nadir of moral evil. Ultimately sin is more than rebellion against God; it is the attempt to destroy God; and that is the first of the two great realities laid bare for ever on the Cross.

## II

Now in the second place, let me try to speak of the other great reality manifested for ever in this same event, God's atoning and redeeming action, in the Passion of 'that strange Man upon His Cross'. It is not theological fiction but historical fact that God was in Christ transforming the worst that man could do into His own best, and making even this sin the occasion of the amazing and costly wonder of forgiveness.

The Cross is not only the act of Pilate, of the High Priest, of the crowd, of the human race itself; it is, at the very same time, the act of God. The New Testament does not say that Jesus is the greatest of all earth's martyrs for truth: it says with infinite variety of idea and metaphor that He is the Lamb



slain from the foundation of the world. God so loved the world that the passion of Christ in all its agony and bloody sweat was at the same time God's action in all its mercy and glory.

Isn't this what makes the Cross the stumbling-block it has always been? There is nothing easy and obvious about it. The Cross is scandalous and offensive and I, for one, refuse to try to smooth out or water down what is obviously the paradox of all existence. It refuses to be rationalized into a nice little homily or a moral commonplace. This is the Gospel which has moved the world! A gospel which could be proclaimed without exciting wonder, would not be worth believing or proclaiming. Very well, let us look at the paradox that is here proclaimed.

A paradox is something containing two elements which seem fundamentally opposed to one another. So here. On the one side there is the sheer wonder of forgiveness. Yes, it is wonderful, says someone, but is it not really immoral? What right have Judas, Caiaphus or Pilate, or any who do wrong with a high hand, to be forgiven? What man will commit a foul wrong against his friend, all the time counting on his friend's loving forgiveness? Will any man who is not morally bankrupt? May a man be unfaithful to his wife, for example, trampling her

love in the dirt—and then take her forgiveness for granted? Not if this universe is built on any eternal moral foundations.

Three men went out one summer night,  
No care had they or aim;  
And dined and drank. 'E'er we go home  
We'll have', they said, 'a game.'

Three girls began that summer night  
A life of endless shame;  
And went through drink, disease and death  
As swift as racing flame.

Lawless and homeless, foul, they died;  
Rich, loved and praised—the men.  
But when they all shall meet with God,  
And Justice speaks—what then?

There is Stopford Brooke's poem, entitled 'Justice'. I need not labour the point it makes; it speaks for itself, and asks the ancient question, Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? And since we are no better than Judas, Caiaphas and the rest—their sins being our sins; typical, not exceptional—have we in strict justice any right to escape damnation? Ought any man to be saved? There is one side of the paradox of the Cross, our strong sense that forgiveness is immoral if it means the condoning or ignoring of sin; if it belittles in any way the eternal necessity of righteousness.

But now look at the other side of the paradox.

(Another critic speaks.) Is not justice—and by this I mean mere justice, stern, inflexible and blind—is it not ultimately a cold and mechanical legalism, more like a physical reaction or a chemical process than a moral relationship between persons? If forgiveness is immoral, is not your letter of the law non-moral? A mediæval legend explains what I mean. Sometime in the twelfth century Henry II of England laid siege to the French city of Le Mans, but failed to take it, and had to retire, enraged and baffled. The legend says that on his death-bed he deliberately blasphemed against God in order to ensure his own damnation. ‘Since Thou hast taken from me the thing-I most delight in—Le Mans—I will deprive Thee of the thing Thou hast most delight in—my soul.’ If that story were an exhaustive description of the moral working of this universe, would the universe really be moral in any sense that personal beings like us could appreciate? Would it not be like a steam-hammer crushing a too-venturesome gnat; or an earthquake engulfing a tadpole? If Henry II’s crude alternative is right, the eternal purpose of God is only an eternal process; there is no love in it to be defied or even defeated; it is not what we mean by ‘moral’ because it does not deal with us in all our deep and desperate need as persons.

There is the other side of the paradox of the Cross. It proclaims man's immemorial need of something more than impersonal legal machinery; of a grace which does not deal with him after his sins nor reward him according to his iniquities. 'Thou must save and Thou alone.' That is his burden: he needs forgiveness: nothing else can meet his case.

I submit that there is only one way in which you can deal with this paradox; listen for a moment to some words of John Bunyan, the Bedford tinker: 'Now I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre where it fell in, and I saw it no more. . . . Then was Christian glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death. . . . Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on, singing.' Bunyan's words come white hot out of experience. They make it clear that our paradox is resolved not by any dialectical theory, but by history, with the Cross of Jesus towering in triumph over it. No argument balancing the opposed claims of justice and love, holiness and forgiveness, told John Bunyan what it means to be set free from the burden of sin; but the fact of the Cross.

Righteousness (as a moral necessity) and Grace (again, as a moral necessity) are fused together in the concrete fact of the Cross. We cannot explain this fusion of two elements which—logically and ‘on paper’, as it were—are mutually exclusive. But we can see and receive it as a fact, in the Cross. Suffering is always the form which goodness and love have to take in any evil situation: every mother who is breaking her heart over a son knows that. Well, He who was Goodness and Love personified, shows us the grace of God dealing redemptively with our evil situation in the very place where it is most concrete, namely His sufferings and death. The Cross is something actual; it is Holy Love Incarnate embodying, beyond all doubt, this paradox of the forgiveness of God.

The more our modern study of the Gospels teaches us what the Gospel evidence is and means, the clearer it becomes that Jesus interpreted His redeeming work in terms of sacrifice. He steadfastly set His face to go to the Cross as His historic destiny. ‘I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.’ It is the mystery of the Kingdom of God that He through whom it comes must (it is Jesus’ constant thought) suffer and die: that only in this paradoxical and shocking form can Holiness manifest itself redemp-

tively as Grace, in a sinful world. The Son of Man must suffer many things. Is not this precisely what we see Him doing with 'deliberate speed, majestic instancy', as He moves from Gethsemane to Calvary?

Jesus Christ is not a passive victim in this drama of sin and salvation, but an Actor throughout: it is the strong Son of God, not the pain-racked figure of Guido Reni's pictures, who endures the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and despises the shame. It is as the conscious Master of the situation that He says 'No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself.' To the last He shows no trace of sentimentality or self-pity; His pity is for the world in bondage. 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.' On the Cross He is more than Conqueror, when He prays for His enemies, saying, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. He knows what it is that He Himself is doing; and so He refuses the anæsthetic that He may be clear-sighted to the last: 'when He had tasted thereof He would not drink'. He reigns from this Tree; this Passion is Action, strong and selfless to the very point where history itself is rent in twain and He utters the words 'It is finished', and yields up the ghost.

Yet this Action is Passion, and we can no more understand the measure of Christ's sufferings than plumb the deep counsels of God.

We may not know, we cannot tell  
What pains He had to bear,  
But we believe it was for us  
He hung and suffered there.

One baffling and tremendous hint is given to us in the cry of desolation, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Any competent theologian will have meditated on a hundred attempted explanations of that terrible cry: but he knows that none of them is really convincing: all of them run out into the ultimate mysteries. What we do know is that He who had identified Himself with sinners to the uttermost, and was here staggering under the fact and burden of sin as only the sinless Son of God could do, was here saying Amen on behalf of humanity to the judgment of God upon sin. And the Church of His Body, participating in His self-offering, has been saying Amen to His Amen ever since. Only He could see and know sin for what it is, because only He could realize to the full the desolation and loss which enmity against God always means. To use the bold New Testament metaphor, He was 'made sin' for us; and lest you and I should dismiss that airily as a theological



fiction, here is this awful cry of dereliction from the Cross to remind us that for that moment at least He was utterly alone. He descended into Hell, for our sakes.

Therefore God also hath highly exalted Him. He rose from the dead and lives for ever in the Church of His Body and at the right hand of God. This high mystery is the subject of the next chapter, and I say no more of it here. Here I am concerned with one thing, what Christ has done for every soul of man on the Cross. He said at the last, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.' All that you and I know of God we know in and through Christ the Redeemer. We commend our spirits to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the confidence given to us through the pierced hands of the Crucified.

O wounded hands, helpless and pierced and torn;  
Strong hands, that suffer more than need be borne;  
O patient hands, nailed bleeding to a board,  
Into Thy hands, O Lord.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHURCH: THE BODY OF CHRIST

SUPPOSE a sheer disaster happens to a man: his boy, the delight of his eyes, is killed by a lorry at the street corner; or a bank fails and he is ruined; or his doctors diagnose cancer; or foot-and-mouth disease stalks into his fields—overnight, as it were—and the finest herd in the county, the patient work of twenty years, has to be destroyed. How is he to face this?

On a rough analysis, there are two obvious alternatives. He may crumple up before the disaster; with no more blame to himself, perhaps, than to a mouse crushed by a steam-roller. Or he may stand up to it and even defy it, bearing it with stoical and almost inhuman fortitude; perhaps, distilling good out of the evil, by faith, as brave men and women have so often had to do, before him.

Is there a third alternative? Could he ignore the disaster or refuse to admit that it is there; not, like Nelson, by putting the telescope to his blind eye for strategic reasons, but by some more serious, more

desperate self-deception? Could he—short of becoming an opium addict or drinking himself to death—maintain that there is no disaster at all, and that everything in the garden is lovely?

I put this seemingly extravagant question because, to the people in the streets of Jerusalem at any rate, this is exactly what the earliest friends and followers of the crucified Jesus seemed to be doing. In the face of the sheer tragedy, the unrelieved disaster of the Cross, these broken and discredited men were suddenly transformed; radiant, steady and confident where they had been mean and cowardly; bold in the name of the Master whom they had but lately denied and forsaken; bold enough to go triumphantly to the Cross themselves when the time came. For they were living in a new world and full of joy as the result. They were new men; indeed, on one great day to which the Church looks back as its birthday, the Jerusalem riff-raff assumed that they had been drinking: 'these men are full of new wine'.

We read the New Testament and listen to the Apostles calling black white. There is something almost truculent about the metaphor which the greatest of them uses to describe the Cross and its aftermath. It sounds so provocatively untrue to what betrayal and scourging, crucifixion and the

grave really are. 'He has forgiven us,' says St. Paul, 'all our sins, cancelling the regulations that stood against us. He set them aside when He nailed them to His Cross.' (Notice that: 'when He nailed them to His Cross'.) 'Having spoiled principalities and powers He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them.' The man who wrote like this gloried in the Cross, and turned its bare and brutal facts right inside out. It was Christ Crucified, he says, who wielded the hammer. When they drove the nails into those hands it was really He who was nailing man's age-long shame and sin to the tree, as a game-keeper nails up vermin in a wood. He defeated them there and exposed them to all the world. He was a conqueror, and we are more than conquerors, through Him.

You and I know, of course, what the idlers in the market-place or the traffickers in the Temple Courts did not know until they heard the preaching of the Gospel, that the Jesus whom they had crucified could not be holden of death; and is alive for ever. This and nothing else was the glowing conviction which made Paul's metaphor; which made and makes the Church. He who was crucified, dead and buried, is its living Head. To speak of the Church, therefore, is to repeat the testimony of the Christian centuries as to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Resurrection and the Church are two aspects of one reality—the triumph of the Cross. Like the concave and convex aspects of one and the same curve, they belong together and cannot be separated. What the early Church proclaimed as its very basis and *raison d'être* was not primarily the teaching of Jesus, nor the fact that He went about doing good, but 'Jesus and the Resurrection'. The first Christians were not looking back to Jesus as the greatest of the sons of Adam; they were looking up to Him as a second Adam, the first-born among many brethren and the living Lord of a new creation.

Therefore St. Paul's bold metaphor was no mere figure of speech to cover up a difficulty; he was not whistling to keep his courage up. Nothing could be more precise and downright than the logic of his argument—as valid and unanswerable to-day as ever it was—'If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain and your hope is vain.' That is to say, our metaphors may be never so daring, but the world will soon call their bluff. In short, the Church was not living then, and it cannot live now, on vague and doubtful rhetoric. A Church which stood for no more than a flabby and ineffectual amiability would no longer be in line with the Church of the Apostles and Martyrs. *They* did not revere the inspiring memory of a dead Jew: they

worshipped a living Lord. Through His Spirit, He was the very ground and environment of their new experience and new life together. Whatever else they were, these people were never wistful. They looked straight at things and their logic was as hard as nails. Without the Resurrection, says St. Paul, the Cross is unrelieved tragedy and the Church is a vain thing. God Himself is as good as dead.

‘But,’ you ask, ‘how did the Resurrection happen?’ No man knows or can know. The Gospels cannot explain it: it alone explains them. As Dr. Cairns of Aberdeen once put it: ‘It is the land where the great mists lie, but it is the land where the great rivers spring.’ What we do know is that it made God authentic to ordinary, wayfaring men and women who discovered in it that though they still suffered and sinned, though they were still subject to vanity and had to die, they were nevertheless sharers in Christ’s victory and were living here and now—with Him and with one another—in the eternal world. Death was still a biological fact, but death no longer had any dominion over them. All dominion belonged to Christ. At His Cross and at His empty tomb, two facts manifesting one final and decisive act of God, they knew that God had rescued them out of the dominion of darkness and transferred them into the Kingdom of the Son of His



love. We cannot conceive how this incredible thing happened—this mighty act of God, strange to all our experience, inscrutable to all our science, repudiated and sometimes ridiculed by much that is considered the best intellect and finest culture of our day. The eternal counsels of God are not explained here, but manifested, with power and great glory. To ask 'how?' is ultimately an academic question; for them, as for us, the vital question was 'what?' And the practical answer to that question was and is the living Church: the Body of Christ.

Edward Gibbon's sneers at Christianity are well known. He takes his place among the greatest historians of all time, yet—as Dean Stanley once observed—his sneers do not alter the fact that his great history entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* might equally well have been called *The Rise and Progress of the Christian Church*. And there, surely, is the true measure of what it has meant and still means 'to know Christ and the power of His Resurrection'.

Criticism of the Church is fashionable and widespread in these days, notoriously enough. Moreover, we Christians have only ourselves to thank, very often, for the indifference, the suspicion or the open hostility of multitudes. The Church has always been made up, of course, of fallible, ordinary people;



always weak, and never really worthy of their high calling; often blind and bigoted; sometimes behaving like savages, and only adding to their blasphemy by being savage in the name of Christ. We cannot deny that the history of the Church has sometimes been just as sad and disgraceful as political or national history has often been. We know this. Yet we know something else too. The Christian Church is still the most important single phenomenon which human history has to show, stretching beyond the sight of any of us, across the centuries and across the continents; transcending ancient differences of blood and soil, speech and culture; failing and falling often enough, yet through faith rising again, to subdue kingdoms and to work righteousness. Centuries ago, in the name of Christ the Redeemer, the Church of our fathers did battle with the gross materialism, sensuality and violence of barbarian society; it quenched the fires of Europe's savage and licentious paganism in the waters of baptism; indeed, in the name of the Redeemer it laid claim to the whole range of our human life from the cradle to the grave. The Church's faith and life are part of the very substance and structure of life as you and I still know it. We are the heirs of the Christian ages, wherein that faith has been one of the master-passions of men, a lamp unto their

feet and a light unto their path; the presupposition and basis of their civilization, the driving force of their culture; the expression—in spite of all its tragic inconsistencies, divisions and degradations—of that life in God through Jesus Christ our Lord which is the most precious heritage of the past to us modern men. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

But, obviously enough, criticism is not silenced by this appeal to history. 'The glory of the past is all very well,' says an impatient modern man or woman, 'but we live in the world of the present which too often seems to be galloping back to paganism as fast as it can go. The Church cannot live on its past without becoming ineffectual, and failing all along the line.' With that I heartily agree, of course. But I ask leave to say two things about it.

First, the people who are always speaking about the failure of the Church do not always realize that they are paying an unintended tribute to it. The quality of life to which the Church witnesses, and which it exists to create and maintain, is the very standard which the world uses to judge its shortcomings. That is quite proper and salutary, of course, but also very significant. The Church itself provides the very measure by which it is found wanting. When, therefore, modern society speaks much

of the Church's failure, it is not unlike the woman, unjustly condemned by the drunken Philip of Macedon, who boldly appealed 'from Philip drunk to Philip sober'. Indeed, it recalls the parallel story of a man who was pleading his cause before the same King Philip; the King went to sleep and, on waking, condemned the man. 'I appeal,' he said. 'To whom?' asked the King. 'To yourself,' was the reply, 'but awake.' My point is that in the very moment of criticizing the Church, the world is really appealing to it.

In the second place, we criticize and even repudiate the Church of our baptism, ignoring the fact that *we* are the Church. We complain that the fire is low and looks like going out, forgetting that we have probably done little or nothing for some time to rake out the dead ashes and put on more coal. Is it not very evident that for every person who will take the trouble to get up from his chair to do just that, a dozen will come and warm their hands at the fire, and even complain because they have been shivering. After all, we expect the fire to be there. Even if we never darken a church door, we like to think that there are church doors at which men can go in to pray: that there are men and women who assert the tremendous reality of God in this naughty world, and praise Him for the means of

grace and the hope of glory. We are indignant when we hear about people who blatantly profess to be godless, forgetting that godlessness is not less real because it is polite and private. A godless man is any man who is content to live without God—a man whose life is empty of prayer. He cannot come to God by proxy: no one can take his place in the secret place. Religion is either his own personal and inalienable affair, or it is nothing.

It is at this point perhaps that someone will say, 'This is all very well, but is it seriously relevant to urgent modern problems and needs, as discussions about the means test, rearmament or the price of bacon obviously are? You speak of the life and faith of the Church considered ideally rather than actually, but, all the same, what has the life and faith of the Church to say and do for people living down our street? What are professing Christians saying, for example, about social justice? Has the Christian Creed any more than an antiquarian interest—like Gothic Architecture or Heraldry—for those who rather like that sort of thing? If not, can you blame men and women for yawning and turning away when ministers of religion, monks or pious ladies utter the tremendous words of the Creed, 'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church'?

Here again I would say two things in reply. The

first has been well put by Canon Quick in a sentence: 'Unless the world becomes more Christian than it is, it will speedily become less moral than it has been.' That is, there is nothing inevitable about those values which we do undoubtedly enjoy as members of a Christian civilization. We assume them as a matter of course and take them for granted; but you cannot have them for ever or for long without the Christian faith as their presupposition and the Christian Society as their context and guarantee. Our civilization, in spite of all its blemishes and its many ghastly failures, is still a Christian civilization. Take away the Christianity and the civilization will not remain what you and I mean by civilization. It will become brutalized, and may—as it sometimes shows clear signs of doing—sink back into barbarism.

In the second place, I would say that the faith of the Christian Church is not only relevant, but urgently necessary, if our civilization is to last, simply because it is *the* social faith: we believe it is the one true way to that community for lack of which our world is perishing. Christianity is not a beautiful philosophy for the cultured few, but life from the dead for men and women everywhere, because it is life lived in fellowship. The artist Burne-Jones once heard an appallingly superior

person say that Christ would have been a more effectual teacher if he had been more cultivated. 'As I live, those were his very words,' wrote the artist. 'And I wanted to smash him with the coal-scuttle and wipe my boots on his face. And in a figure of speech I did, and for days I railed at education and pined for the company of cabmen.'

How refreshing that is, and how true to the genius of the Christian religion, with its warning that pride is a deadly sin. The culture which is spiritually proud, self-centred and exclusive has no place in the Kingdom of God unless it repents and learns, even from publicans and harlots, what fellowship means. Jesus did not come to lecture to the cultivated who are not as other men; with a touch of satire he said to such people, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.' The best people—those whom the world has always recognized as its saints—have never made any bones about this; they have always recognized that they are sinners; they have seen in Jesus Christ the Holy One of God and have accepted at His hands the forgiveness of God with penitence and joy. It is humility like this which unites people, gathering them into a family, a community. Jesus came to rescue men from selfish and lonely individualism, the corporate effects of which are a kingdom not of God but of evil, ever becoming



more evil and more tyrannous. He came to open the Kingdom of God to all who will believe in it and enter into it, living together as brothers because they enjoy the freedom of sons; escaping from the jungle of individualism into the fellowship of a great family, the family of God.

Our world is hungry for fellowship. Community is the key to all the social thinking and action of our time. Our present discontents, and our new and ruthless methods of dealing with them, make this plain. 'Totalitarianism' in all its forms seems to be the desperate answer of millions of people to an individualism which makes fine-sounding speeches about the sacred rights of individual personality, but which too often means in practice 'Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost'.

There can be no true personality without true community; no true freedom for the individual without friendship with other individuals; and the fellowship which plain men are wanting and restlessly demanding, is the real thing; not an empty word which only nauseates them with its unreality. They know that true life is common life; they have seen this in miniature in family life at its finest; many a man has caught a glimpse of its possibilities for the whole world every time he has been a member of a team—in a football eleven, for example, or in an



orchestra. The crew of a North Sea fishing boat know what it is and means, as they do big work with danger and hardship in it—together. Indeed, the grimmest irony in modern life is that men found something of this dream coming true in the trenches, when engaged in the hellish work of wholesale massacre from 1914-18; the cut-throat competition of civic life—wherein a man's hand is so often against his neighbours, in the struggle to make a living—yielded in war-time to the pressure of the enemy. Is it true that we can only achieve something like community life among ourselves when we are straining every nerve to destroy other people? Is world war the price of such fellowship? God forbid! He brought me forth, wrote the Psalmist, into a large place. Men want that—the larger life, inspired by a common purpose, a common exhilarating loyalty to something which is altogether bigger than the stale and petty aims of individual self-interest. They want to find Something whose service is perfect freedom; Something which binds all lives together, which all can love without hypocrisy and reverence without reserve; Something which will call out their chivalry and high devotion, enabling them to find themselves as brothers because they have lost themselves as isolated, self-centred units.

Very well; what is this Something? Is it the

State? Is nationalism the chief end of man? Or shall we erect race into a creed, building our community life on a ruthless contempt for any blood other than our own?

Love of country and loyalty to one's own race are precious and God-given, of course: they are part of the order of God's creation as we know it and, as I try to show in the next chapter, they create tragic tensions for the Christian living in the world and rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

Nevertheless, since man can only worship God—any other worship being idolatry—he knows that he must render to God the things that are God's. And if it be true that God has spoken to us in His Son, the Community of our dreams can only be a worshipping Community, praying and working for the City of God. The Church of Christ's Body is the sacrament of true Community: it is the gift of God to needy men, the extension in time of His revelation in Jesus Christ; in its life He assures to us the means of grace, and the hope of glory.

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD: CONFLICTING LOYALTIES

IF you have ever taken a holiday in the heart of France, a walking tour along the valley of the Loire, you know that at the height of summer it is a land of light, warmth and colour. In this laughing garden Rabelais was born. The river moves lazily past countless peaceful vineyards. The castles are so picturesque, suggesting the sentimentalism of Romance rather than the stern times when they were built.

But again and again, as you walk, a change comes—suddenly. Banks of heavy cloud pile up fast in the clear sky, sometimes to deluge a few square miles with a tempest of rain; more often, only to threaten you with a few heavy drops, and to pass over, leaving you to the brilliant sun and the illimitable blue. In that landscape of high lights and shadows there is always a rainbow somewhere—and such rainbows—intense against the distant storm, just as Constable loved to paint them.

The New Testament is like that. It is no book for sentimental idealists, though it is the fountain-head of all our idealism. We cannot read it without being startled, often, by that cloud in the midst of the exceeding brightness. There is thunder at high noon. Hard sayings, dark and enigmatic words, come upon us like a bolt from the blue. Out of the heaven of His infinite grace and benediction the stern and oft-times incomprehensible words of Jesus drop like a cloudburst, and leave us gasping. Little wonder that of one man we read that 'he was grieved at that saying'; and of others that 'they understood not that saying'; and of others the simple and moving statement that 'they were afraid'. Jesus could look upon the rich young aristocrat and love him . . . and immediately make a most stringent demand. Jesus can confront us, in the very midst of what the hymn book calls our 'Joy and Peace in Believing', with this word which on the lips of any other would be savage, if not ridiculous: 'If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

But who is sufficient for that? Is it surprising that His family once thought that He was mad? What will you make of that? What have you made of it

in the debate which has gone on in your own soul between those conflicting loyalties which are the very stuff of tragedy? We read the Gospels with such easy acquiescence, do we not; giving enthusiastic and even glib assent to the sublimities of Christ's teaching; almost purring over the Beatitudes and the Golden Rule. We suppose that we can bask in the sunshine of this divine revelation: and suddenly we are drenched to the skin; there is tempest and thunder and the lightning as it goeth from the East unto the West.

Even if we look at this hard and baffling saying in that other context in St. Matthew, where we can receive it more easily, is the hyperbole really any less astonishing? You remember that there Jesus is sending out the Twelve. He sends them with stern and uncompromising commands. Seeing clearly all that will be done to them, He bids them go. They are to take nothing, not even a purse of money. They are to set out to proclaim something, Good News, the joyful tidings of the reign of God. 'And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake,' says Jesus. He says it incidentally, almost casually, as though it were obvious and natural. And as if to present the conditions of discipleship in their clearest and most vivid light; as if to insist that the highest loyalty is to be asserted at all costs, he adds: 'He

that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. I am come, to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother.'

Is this an echo of an older, sterner time on the lips of the Holy One and the Just? 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God; thou shalt have no other gods before me.' And here in the fulness of time when God speaks His Word, His last word, as it were, in His Son, must we read: Thou shalt have neither son nor daughter, father nor mother, before me? Life's dearest loyalties, earth's most intimate ties—all must yield to loyalty to Him? Truly a jealous Christ.

Serious men cannot escape this unresolved tension of opposites within the Gospel. It is so easy to come to Christ. It is so hard to come to Him. He transcends the power of our logic to effect a synthesis of His qualities. His word, as Shakespeare saw, is paradoxical almost to the point of absurdity:

The Word itself against the Word. As thus,  
 'Come, little ones': and then again,  
 'It is as hard to come as for a camel  
 To thread the postern of a needle's eye.'

The irresolvable complexity of this problem is



borne in upon all men, especially in these days of urgency and uncertainty. These crown rights of the Redeemer which wayfaring men can neither obey nor disregard—what are we to say of them? Is there any ultimate synthesis of truth, rising up for us in all its majesty and comfort out of thesis and antithesis which here stare us in the face?

## I

*Our holy religion does make an absolute demand upon us.* We begin there, and we may not begin anywhere else. There is a burning realism about the Gospel, as the history of Christian martyrdom testifies, and we dare not pretend to be able to water it down or to explain it in such wise that we explain it away.

After all, it is the unshakable testimony of history, literature and conscience that man's moral and spiritual values are an essential part of him; they are constitutive of his being: his sense of the sacred is an ultimate fact, not to be bargained with nor weighed against anything else: its worth for him is incomparable and its binding obligation absolute. It is independent of temporal consequences like persecution and death.

The Christian man finds this, or rather is found



by this, in God's revelation to him in Jesus Christ; he may not escape the implicit logic of this revelation by presuming to alter its fundamental premisses. The world knows what to think of such casuistry. A man of the world may make no profession of the Faith: he may shrug his shoulders and say, 'It is high, I cannot attain unto it.' But he despises the Christian who sets out elaborate and ingenious excuses for lowering the standard of Christ's demands, for accommodating the ethical import of the Gospel to the poor level of worldly attainment. Notoriously enough the Jesuits did something like that in the seventeenth century. They invented ways whereby a cultured society might serve Christ and the world at the same time; but the brilliant irony of Pascal's Provincial Letters which they brought down on their heads expresses the scorn which plain men everywhere feel for high profession which is not vindicated in practice.

I would not be misunderstood here. I hasten to remind you that the genius of Christianity lies not in the legalism of a code nor in the moralism of ethical endeavour, but in the sovereign grace of God which makes that endeavour possible and fruitful. We do wrong to suggest that Christianity is exhaustively described as obedience to the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, as though it were a Mount

Everest of an Ethic to be painfully attempted but never climbed. As has been finely said by Professor Dodd, 'The immense energy of the religious life is rooted in a moment of passivity, in which God acts.' Moreover, to quote John Oman's similar judgment, 'nothing could more defeat the purpose of grace than to make our goodness its starting-point and not its goal'.

This means, however, that the goal is there, and that the life of ethical endeavour is inevitably involved in the gospel of grace. The strange thing about Jesus Christ is that His ethic—so impossible to mortal men whose failure and sin is ever before them—is never irrelevant. Christianity is never quietism. Thoroughgoing otherworldliness is as grievous a denial of the meaning of the Incarnation as thoroughgoing secularism. We are in no doubt as to the hypocrisy and blasphemy of an unethical evangelicalism.

For Christianity means taking Jesus Christ as Lord over the whole range of human life, and swearing fealty to Him as King. When the Huguenots were besieged in St. Quentin, the Spaniards shot an arrow into the market-place, carrying a scornful demand for surrender. Coligny ordered the paper to be shot back again bearing the words *Regem habemus*. Well, we too have a King, and the stern words of

the Gospel help us to face the unambiguous fact. If we take Christ at all we take Him as King. Discipleship can mean nothing less. He will accept no lesser place. I am urging no fanatical novelty upon you. That 'Jesus is Lord' was probably the earliest confession in the Church, the first and simplest creed of all. That 'in all things He might have the pre-eminence' either means that Christ has the first claim upon our loyalty, or language doesn't mean anything. He is all and in all. That is, He is everything and everywhere. He is Truth, and Truth ever disdains a divided allegiance. When, out of the pathos of our finitude and poor mortality, we cry

O for a closer walk with God,

we have to go on at once to cry:

The dearest idol I have known,  
 Whate'er that idol be,  
 Help me to tear it from Thy throne  
 And worship only Thee.

It is the jealousy of the divine love which demands everything. When it leads me to the Lamb, then I cannot help knowing and confessing that

Love so amazing, so divine,  
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.

## II

*In this world of time and sense and sin, there is a notorious conflict between the ideal and the empirical; a tension between absolute and relative validities, which is the very stuff of tragedy.* I need not elaborate this which is the familiar subject matter of all our modern debate about the possibility and relevance of the Christian ethic. The problem springs right out of the tragic complexity of life as all men know it. Supposing love to Christ and loyalty to Him should inevitably involve the neglect of our nearest and dearest; disloyalty to mother or wife or child: treason to civil society in all its sacredness; what then?

It is no theoretical difficulty, as you very well know. Suffering and martyrdom have too real a place in Christian history for it ever to be that. You cannot explain Saints, Apostles, Prophets and Martyrs by dismissing them as inhuman. When Perpetua gave birth to her baby at Carthage, and then went serene and triumphant to the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, do you suppose that she knew nothing of a mother's love? When Luther wrote those fearful words, 'And though they take our life, goods, honour, children, wife . . .' you dare not suppose that he did not love his little girl Magdalena

or his little son Hans Luther; not if you have read his letters to them. When Cromwell's wife wrote to him—was it before Dunbar?—and besought him to think of his safety for her sake, his reply was surely eloquent enough of the very problem with which we are all wrestling: 'Thou art dearer to me than any creature; let that suffice.' 'Than any creature,' you notice: for the man believed in God, His Creator and Redeemer.

Come down to our own time, to see this same immemorial problem, which has torn an Antigone, a Jeremiah, a Jeannie Deans, with tragic agony. What is the German Lutheran in the Confessional Church to do when his religious recusancy is regarded as political disaffection, and his loyalty to Christ as virtual treason? The answer is neither obvious nor easy. There are temporal goods and temporal loyalties, and the State has its sacred rights. The State is an aspect of the longsuffering of God. If it has not an absolute claim, it has a relative claim upon man. Civil society is an essentially religious order, since the whole of life is the sacred gift of God. We may not turn our backs on secular good and temporal duties, since all these form the subject matter of our God-given calling within the world.

Let me speak for a moment of the burning issue which confronts us all here and will not let us alone,

the urgent issue of Peace and War in this modern time. The conscientious pacifist knows only too well that *in fact*, and *here and now*, his pacifism virtually condones foul iniquity—every victory of barbarism over the helpless and defenceless, for example, of which the history of our time becomes increasingly full. But the conscientious militarist is involved in the same fearful dilemma. Since war is always modern war, he cannot help (willy nilly) condoning the asphyxiation and disembowelling of innocent men and women and children every time a bomb is dropped and gases let loose. This, too, is a foul iniquity; it is blasphemy against the temple of the Holy Ghost, whatever he may say, however excellent his motives and however far-seeing his policy. He is doing evil that good may come; he, too, is involved in a tragic dilemma from which there is no escape. It is part of the abiding mystery of iniquity.

Someone will say, perhaps, that we are helpless before such vast and super-personal issues; we look on, stunned and impotent, while world-shaking events hurry one after another to the vestibule of their destiny. Demonic forces are all about us, disclosing the horrifying depths of evil in this world. What can we do? I can only answer you by bringing the problem right home to our very doors, and present-

ing it in terms of our relationships with one another in our daily living. Here is a girl employed to do up stockings in bundles of twelve. They are cheap stockings and the firm employing her is none too reputable. She is required to include one defective pair in each bundle. She must either obey the firm's cynical instructions or lose her livelihood. But it is not merely her livelihood: she has a bed-ridden mother utterly dependent on her. She loves her mother. It may be that the love of Christ constrains her to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty and to give up the stocking-wrapping. But can she? She is torn not so much between a right and a wrong as between two rights, her love for her mother and her love for Christ. This tension between absolute and relative validities is the very stuff of tragedy.

The issue is not peculiarly modern, of course; it is part of man's abiding predicament as a moral being and a sinner. It was as real in Galilee in the first century as it is in America in the twentieth. And Jesus faces it. He faces it on the Cross as He goes down there into the darkness; we know this, if only because 'there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His mother'. Moreover, He calls us to face it with Him and in Him as the Church of His Body. Even the claims of His nearest and dearest are set against the





background of eternity. 'Who is my mother and my brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and my mother.'

Are we at a deadlock, then? The wayfaring man asks wistfully how this tragic tension is to be resolved in the common business of living. Is it necessarily true that this stern word of absolute demand on the lips of Christ must always present us His followers with so cruel a dilemma? Is there no way out? Must Christian discipleship have the elements of endless tragedy within it, if it is to be sincere and whole-hearted? Can we really believe that He who utters so stern a challenge did not care about life's intimacies, its home ties, its precious personal relationships? Surely it is the Gospel of the New Testament which has given to men a new and abiding vision of the sacred worth of personality; which has said of little children that of such is the Kingdom of Heaven; which has set the institution of marriage on the highest of all levels. How then can Christ, the Lord of all life, demand that we choose between son or daughter, wife or friend—and Himself? Does He ask that? Here obviously is the crux of the whole matter. The doing of the sovereign will of God may lead men in the end to prison and to death; Christianity would not have lived if it had not been

prepared to die, and so to fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. The Cross is indeed crucial here. But does this supreme loyalty really exclude all others? Does it not ultimately embrace them?

### III

*The supreme loyalty, so far from conflicting with lesser loyalties, must ultimately include them all.* We do wrong in thinking that the loyalties which conflict in this our fallen world-order are irreconcilable opposites. They are not. They belong together in that unity of which the living God is the source and ground. This is a truth which men may have to die to vindicate, since the end is not yet. *But it is a truth*, however costly may be its vindication.

In conclusion, then, let me commend to you this paradox which more than one well-known passage from our literature illustrates, and which is supremely vindicated in the religious experience of man. Two illustrations will suffice, coming as they do from an unlikely quarter. The first is from the sententious speech of Polonius to Laertes:

This above all, to thine own self be true  
And it must follow as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Polonius was a rash, intruding fool, but he was

right here. Loyalty to oneself does not mean naked individualism, every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. If being true to oneself means being true to God and loving the highest when we see it, we have yet to meet the man who because he loves God dishonours his wife. We have yet to learn that because a Christian serves the living God, he loves and serves his country less. Unless patriotism is always to be the last refuge of the scoundrel, our holy religion is the true patriotism, and the citizenship of our dreams will be found only in the City of God. Ultimately these loyalties are correlative and not contradictory; the one is not only poor, it is impossible—without the other.

The second illustration is equally familiar:

I could not love thee, dear, so much  
Loved I not honour more.

A Caroline love lyric is here saying in its own way and in its own context what Christian men and women have confessed throughout the centuries, that we cannot really love our mothers, our wives, our country and our brethren everywhere for whom Christ died—we cannot love them as we might do and ought to do—until we love God, making devotion to His Holy Will the supreme and all-embracing loyalty. If our divorce-court proceedings are one of the scandals of Christendom in these days, is it not

because men and women who resort thither were once in love with one another, but never really lifted up their love into the blazing light of God's eternal purposes for them? Can we love one another truly save by doing so at the highest, deepest levels? All our complex human relationships—so variously and infinitely ramified, so delicately and subtly joined, so difficult to apprehend and to order aright—all these are seen for what they are only in the clear and burning light which shines from the face of Jesus Christ. 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more.' Even secular duties cannot be efficiently performed save in the light of eternity. As Carlyle puts it somewhere, a man cannot make a pair of boots rightly except he do it in a devout manner. And if boots are to be well made, if wife and children are to be truly loved, if country is to be truly served and governed—these things can never be ends in themselves. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Let us be neither hypocritical nor sentimental. There is a loyalty which each man must put even before loyalty to his nearest and dearest. His nearest and dearest themselves recognize it as the supreme loyalty, if they are what they ought to be. In the end the loyalties may clash in very tragic fashion. You and I may be called upon to choose. It may mean

taking up the Cross—hardship, contumely and tears, and the cry, O Lord how long—all for conscience' sake. All this may be ours as the cloud overhangs our life. Christianity has never pretended that pain may be eliminated from this mortal life; it has never admitted that any evil is preferable to death. What it has proclaimed with joy and triumph, like silver trumpets pealing out across a night of darkness, desolation and woe, is the triumph of God Himself revealed in the Cross and the Resurrection of His Son from the dead; giving us in this world knowledge of His truth and, in the world to come, life everlasting.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHRISTIAN HOPE: LIFE EVERLASTING

Four weeks ago I received a letter from a stranger in Yorkshire which read as follows:

I am sixty-five years of age, retired after an active life, and very happy. My wife is six months younger than me. We have been married forty years very happily. We have never attended church. We have never said a prayer. We neither of us believe in life after death. We believe in making this world better. Without being egotistical, I believe we have succeeded. We are highly respected by our neighbours. We are not hampered by creeds, but stare life squarely in the face. You might, in your talks, tell me what religion has to offer us.

Although that may sound astonishingly complacent, I confess that I am grateful to the writer for making a familiar position so nakedly clear. He wraps nothing up. With an engaging downrightness he blurts out what many people would not say unless they were pressed—namely, that the Christian faith is irrelevant to life as he knows it and



has to live it; it is therefore futile. Let sentimentalists build their churches and indulge their strange nostalgia for eternity; he is content to be the Realist, concerning himself with this world—its facts, problems and needs—the only world about which he knows anything or wants to know anything. To quote him once again, 'We are not hampered by creeds, but stare life squarely in the face.'

But, plainly enough, this honest man is committed to one great and far-reaching creed. He says so explicitly. 'We believe in making this world better.' And to that, of course, all Christians will say Amen. They know that it is the will of God that they should strive ceaselessly to make this world better than it is, by doing justly and loving mercy. Christians know that faith without works is dead, and that an unethical pietism is blasphemy.

This, then, is most certainly our belief; but only because it is not the whole of our belief. Indeed, if social betterment were the sole content of my creed, I should find it very 'hampering' for two reasons. 'Staring life squarely in the face', I find two facts confronting me which make this notion of steady progress towards some Utopian goal of social evolution upon earth, very difficult.

The first is an historical fact. History knows little or nothing of inevitable progress along a

straight ascending line from primitive barbarism to the perfect human society; that is a modern superstition which cannot stand up to serious examination at the hands of historians such as Edward Meyer or Professor Arnold Toynbee. Archæology is making plainer every day that the cultural achievements of man do not last; even the greatest of them contain the seeds of their own corruption and decay. Of the twenty-one civilizations known to us since the dawn of history, fourteen have come to grief; we know of some of them only through the ruins which comment so pathetically on their vanished greatness, and so ironically on their confident pride. Five thousand years ago the culture of Babylon attained a perfection at least equal to our own, yet it crumbled and vanished without leaving a trace, and for centuries its very existence was not even guessed at. It was not only a grave, but a forgotten and unsuspected grave. You will remember Shelley's sonnet on the broken colossus in the desert:

And on the pedestal, these words appear,  
'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair.'  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Like the Greek myth of the Titans who warred in

vain against Olympus, or like the Hebrew myth of the Tower of Babel—that sonnet is a realist comment on man's overweening confidence in himself and on the purely secular ideal of human progress. History is not a cordial for drooping spirits until it has been a purge for complacent optimism. Unless it points men beyond itself to the eternal world, it is only a row of tombstones. This is the first of two facts which the would-be realist has to stare squarely in the face. It was so once in Babylon, and it is so still in Yorkshire.

The second is a moral fact. Even if the historical evidence allowed us to believe that humanity is marching steadily onward and upward, and will reach Utopia in the end, there are grave moral objections to calling this an optimistic belief. Professor A. E. Taylor of Edinburgh is surely right in calling it a 'foolish alias for pessimism'. For it ruthlessly sacrifices the toiling, dying generations of the present and the dead generations of the past, to the lucky generations of a far-distant future. It is optimistic, admittedly, about those who will some day reap the harvest of centuries of pain, sweat and sacrifice (ignoring the fact that they, too, will have to die), but it treats our human lives—made in the image of God and infinitely precious in His sight—as so many crushed stones paving the

road to the distant goal; they are but means to an end, not sacred ends in themselves; they are Time's cannon-fodder making the world safe for Utopia.

The moral objection to all this is that it involves a profound and inhuman devaluation of all that we mean by human personality. To speak about making the world better in this purely secular sense, is really to announce that men are not men at all; they are no better than sheep or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain. Their life is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time and vanisheth away. And their history, with all its love and heroism, its sacrifices and tears, does not point beyond Time and Death and the fashion of this world; there is no living God on whom its hope may be set: it is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

So much for the secular doctrine of progress with its exclusive interest in what is seen and temporal. The Christian doctrine of progress is different, since it is religious to the core. Christian optimism certainly includes this interest in a better order of things on earth: it takes nothing away from this honest, one-sided enthusiasm for the redemption of the world, but it adds something to it—another dimension, as it were. It shares the reformer's in-

dignation at wrong, at needless misery, disease and folly; his healthy rage against the nauseating other-worldliness which would neglect social duty here and now. It knows that if God's will is to be done at all, it is to be done here, on earth. Nevertheless, just because the Christian hope is a religious hope, it looks beyond this earth to a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God; it looks beyond Time and Death. This world can never suffice us; here we have no continuing city, but we seek one that is to come. Christianity, then, is other-worldly as well as this-worldly, just because it is eternal life in God. The key to our human riddle is something more than social evolution towards an earthly kingdom of happiness; it is more, too, than the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. We look in faith and hope towards an End; a goal of history lying beyond history; a resurrection of all believing souls into a new divine order.

My correspondent from Yorkshire seems to me to be right, therefore, in what he affirms, but wrong in what he denies; indeed, it is just here that the Christian faith affirms three things.

First, it takes Death seriously, as man has ever done and cannot help doing, since he *is man*. He is not a piece of intricate clockwork, nor a clever

animal, but a moral and spiritual being who—though linked by physical evolution with the animals—is a new, distinct and unique fact in God's creation. He looks before and after, as even the most intelligent elephant or ape does not; he rises to heights and plunges to depths as animals—if we know anything of their psychology—cannot do. He has, like Cleopatra, immortal longings in him. He alone of all created things, is able to say with Peter Pan, 'To die will be an awfully big adventure.' Someone has said that if you wanted to raise the beasts to the level of man, it would only be necessary to give them one idea, the idea of death. The *fact* of death is a universal fact, admittedly; it is common to cabbages and kings; all living creatures come to dusty death at the last, including the creature called man. Why take death so seriously, then? Why get excited over what is, after all, an ultimate biological fact? Is Death any more of a problem than growth or summer rain or the ancient rocks? No. Death is not. But having to die *is* a problem. It is a problem peculiar to man alone, the supreme illustration of the ultimate incomprehensibility of this world in which he finds himself. This is where cabbages and kings part company. Man is never really at home in this universe of time and sense; his heart is restless; he is ever a stranger here, a misfit, a wanderer;



and it is the idea of death—having to die—which calls out the age-old, human question

. . . whether, stepping forth, my soul shall see  
New prospects, or fall sheer, a blinded thing.  
There is, O Grave, thy hourly victory,  
And there, O Death, thy sting.

In short, are you, in the end, no more than a blown-out candle, surrounded by an abyss of nothingness—a rocket displaying its pretty cascade of stars for a moment or two, only to fall back into darkness? Or are you surrounded by a great Deep, not of Nothingness, but of Perfect Being which is God? Is it true, that the Eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms? That is the question which the Christian religion—with its Christian doctrine of what man is—forces man to ask.

In the second place, it answers that question. Jesus Christ is God's Everlasting Yea to that question. In the Man called Christ, God has already acted with power and great glory, on behalf of the creature called Man, by bringing life and immortality to light. Forgive me for being personal for a moment. Here an ounce of testimony is worth a ton of theory: I know and cannot doubt that God has spoken to me, decisively, authoritatively, merci-

fully, in His Son. And, what is more, this is not merely my poor little experience, my own private little fad, and therefore quite unimportant. The Church of the New Testament and of nineteen centuries of time owes its very existence to the same thrilling, aweing, comforting certainty. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit means nothing else. We speak that which we know—namely, that Jesus Christ makes the supernatural order authentic, for ever and ever. The eternal world is not a mere idea, or a dream, or a possibility—but a present possession, here and now. In Him—in His words and acts, His ministry, death and resurrection—the Kingdom of God has come upon us. The eternal order is a fact of experience for all with eyes to see and hearts to respond to God's revelation in this Man. In spite of the brokenness and the seeming vanity of things, and in spite of death, life eternal has already begun here for those who will receive it at the hands of Jesus Christ, as the gift of God to the world. By His entry into the very stuff of our human story, Jesus Christ has made a difference to it for ever. Looked at in one way, the story is drab enough—like a fabric which, though made of silk, is of a rather depressing colour. But looked at another way, it suddenly gleams with light. It is shot-silk : this temporal order is already shot through

with the radiance of eternity. Out of the very centre of it all comes a great and strong voice saying, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.'

But this is not all. The Christian faith affirms a third thing; a climax to this drama of world-history in which we are all players; a real end to the present world order. 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' Yes, and somehow or other—in a manner which eye hath not seen nor ear heard—there will be a last act and a final curtain; the stage itself will disappear and be no more.

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind.

Language fails us here, obviously enough; all our Christian vocabulary about the last things is inevitably symbolic; it is picture-language rather than precise philosophy. Indeed, our philosophy cannot help us much because it cannot conceive how time can have a beginning or an end. But the imaginative symbolism of poetry does help us here; and what Shakespeare says in the mouth of Prospero is

what (in its own context, of course) the New Testament says about the true evaluation of this world. In some sense the Kingdom of God is already present. Yes. But in a truer sense it lies beyond history because only there will God's purpose be finally consummated.

Plainly enough, the purpose of God is not fulfilled on the plane of this world-history which we know; nor will it be. Imperfection remains and will remain; we see no prospect of its being completely done away here; the eternal purposes of God cannot be perfectly and completely realized in this finite order where failure and folly are ever with us and where sinful man's reconciliation with God is ever incomplete.

This doesn't mean, of course, that things seen and temporal don't matter and that we may ignore them. No Christian who has set himself to do the will of God would presume to treat this world of time and sense like that. Its facts and events, however trivial, have an eternal significance; they mean something to the living God, since they are the subject matter, the raw material, of His eternal purpose. History is His workshop; every moment of it is a hammer-stroke on His anvil; only on the roaring loom of time can the garment be woven by which we see the Invisible and Eternal One. Only by taking flesh

could the Eternal Son dwell among us, and show us His eternal glory.

But, though God's purpose is being wrought out on history's anvil, there must be an end to history and the fashion of this world, if God's purpose is to come to complete and final expression. History itself must be wound up by Him who alone gives it its unity and moral meaning. The Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the dead, the New Heaven and the New Earth—are symbolic ways of saying that the divine significance of history can never be fully disclosed by history; it cannot ultimately be measured in terms of history at all.

Here, then, the Christian faith is seen to be a Christian hope. It is a concern for this world which is nevertheless other-worldly; it understands facts such as food and clothes, houses and education, cities and empires—only against the background of their impermanence. It expects an End, a decisive climax, an ultimate Judgment—when all these things will be seen for what they are, and either gathered up into God's redeeming purpose, or rejected. It cares profoundly about to-day, because it cares still more profoundly about the Last Day.

If you arrange two lenses in a certain way, you

have the principle of the telescope; and you may see quite plainly, even from where you are, the Delectable Mountains and the gates of the Celestial City. If you arrange the same two lenses in another way, you have the principle of the microscope, with which to look very closely at all the minute details of life as it has to be lived here and now, in Vanity Fair or the Valley of the Shadow. The Christian faith is like that; it is neither other-worldly nor this-worldly, but both.

Since succeeding chapters are about the right to believe, and about commitment of ourselves to this Christian faith, there is one question which will not be ignored if the whole matter is not mere frivolous speculation. It springs right out of our belief that the whole historical process will, at the last, be wound up by Christ at His Second Coming; and it is this: 'What is at stake? Does it matter whether I commit my ways to Him? And if so, how much does it matter? Is the life of blessedness in God something that may conceivably be lost? Was St. Paul talking nonsense when he spoke of starting others in the race, but failing himself to qualify?'

It would require more time than I have, and certainly more knowledge than any man has, to answer those questions adequately. Here I shall content myself with one answer given by one of the



greatest hymn-writers in our language: it sums up  
the very genius of our religion:

Jesus, my Lord—I know His Name,  
His Name is all I trust;  
Nor will He put my soul to shame,  
Nor let my hope be lost.

Firm as His Throne His promise stands,  
And He can well secure  
What I've committed to His hands  
Till the decisive hour.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE: COMMITMENT

ABOUT twenty-five years ago an historian wrote an article in the *Independent Review* which proved something of a bombshell. He made an attack on Magna Carta, insisting that what had hitherto been cited as a charter of liberty was no such thing; it extorted 'liberties' from a helpless king for the sole benefit of a ruling class; its claim to be a charter of freedom for the whole nation was a splendid myth invented by the lawyer Coke in the seventeenth century, as a weapon of attack against James I.

Whether this astonishing thesis had any truth in it is not my concern here. I am concerned, however, with an undoubted truth which gives to Magna Carta—and to much else in the distant past—a precious importance to-day. That document signed at Runnymede stands out as a landmark not only because of what it actually was, but because of what it has come to be in the minds of later generations.

It embodies not only a fact, but a faith. Its real value lies in what it was in 1215, of course, but also in what it came to mean to Pym and Hampden in 1625, and in what it has come to mean to you and me in 1938. The historic fact is more than bare fact; living men look back to it, believe in it and make it their own. Indeed, unless history is, in some sense, contemporary history—speaking a living word which we hear and to which we make response—it is a dead letter. Unless the past *is* something here and now, men will soon forget what it *was*.

The Christian religion is rooted in the stuff of past events, to which the Bible bears witness. It is not a nebulous mysticism, but a revelation of God in certain concrete facts. What we know of God we know in and through the Jesus of history. Yes; but the story of Jesus is nothing if it is safely imprisoned in the past. Without man's response—a response of a certain kind known as belief—all this is mere debris from the past, dry bones instead of life. It is like the grains of wheat preserved these three thousand years with the mummy of an Egyptian Pharaoh, and now in a museum by the Nile—an exhibit, dry and dead in its little glass bottle, and notably unlike the growing, living corn which sways green or gold in the mud-fields near by.

Tradition as such is always dead unless a man so

responds to it as to make it live. Old Testament history, the Gospel story, the white heat of St. Paul's evangelical experience, the bold flights of thought in his epistles, the life of the Church in its worship and action, its sacraments and preaching, its theologies and creeds—all this is weary, stale, flat and unprofitable apart from faith to make it glow with light and become alive. Without that response from me and you and those who come after us, the glorious gospel of the blessed God is archæological pedantry, the hobby of a few specialists; and the Holy Catholic Church is a museum filled with the bones of the dead.

Very well; what is the nature of this Christian belief? What does the right to believe involve? Does it mean assenting to certain propositions—your intellectual agreement with the details of creed or confession? Is the Church a school of people who hold the correct doctrines? And if so, is not bigotry a Christian virtue?

Far be it from me to belittle doctrine, with its precise and careful safeguards against vagueness and woolly-mindedness; you can no more banish clear and formulated thinking from religion than you can from engineering, medicine or law. Just as every language has its grammar, whether you and I bother about grammar or not, so the Christian religion

involves some theology, even though some may prefer to run the risk of a muddle-headed sentimentalism by doing without any theology at all. The point I am making here in passing is the obvious one that though I can have faith in medicine without knowing anything about vitamins or the chemistry of digestion, nevertheless medicine does involve exact science in these matters, which specialists at least must have, and which others can have if they give time and trouble to get it. As an Englishman I can honour Magna Carta by remembering that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and by consciously making my political liberty a living thing, but that does not mean that the textbooks on constitutional history can be thrown into the dustbin, or that historical research on the evolution of Parliament is a waste of time. In the same way, therefore, we have to serve God with the mind, as well as with heart and hand; the obligation to be intelligent is a moral obligation. Not for nothing have true religion and sound learning often been coupled together.

But, having made that plea for Christian doctrine in this untheological age, I must go on to assert the primary and fundamental thing, namely, that faith is altogether more than assent to propositions, however true. It is the devotion of the heart rather than

the knowledge and assent of the intellect. Carlyle described us all as 'mostly fools', and often enough it looks as though he were right. I am glad, therefore, that our salvation does not depend on thinking rightly about the mysteries of our Faith, but on committing ourselves in faith—with all our faculties of heart, mind and will—to One who is, in one sense, altogether mysterious to us, but who nevertheless comes nigh unto us in the fashion of a Man, living and dying and triumphing in such a way that we cannot help confessing Him as the Divine Lord of the Universe, and the Shepherd of our souls. Christ lives, not in our intellectual assent to truth about Him, but in the life we dedicate to Him.

Thus, I submit that believing the Gospel is a different activity from believing, say, that there are rings round Saturn or that the President of the United States is clean-shaven or that the angles of an equilateral triangle are equal. A man may talk religion by the hour and yet it may not be the dominant and abiding motive of his life. Do you remember Tom Hood's poem about the pious Mrs. Cope?

Not pious in its proper sense,  
 But chattering like a bird  
 Of Sin and Grace—in such a case  
 Magpiety's the word!



You are hardly likely to misunderstand me here because you know very well, as I certainly do, that we are tempted easily enough to talk *about* God, and even to discuss Him; but how many of us have learned by long self-discipline and by the undiminished yearning of the years really to speak *to* God in prayer, and to hear Him speaking to us? Believe me, a man may know much about theology and little about religion; he is an expert at the grammar, but he doesn't speak the language; he is a wizard in the use of time-tables, but he never takes a train; he knows all there is to be known about the off-side rule, but as he never plays football himself, going on to the ground and applying the rule as a forward or a full back—he is a spectator only; interested, yes, but not actively engaged.

Well, it may be possible to define, say, mathematics, as correct thinking about numbers and their relations, but religion is always more than correct thinking about God. Indeed, is that even possible? If God were an object of our thought, He would not be what we mean by God—One who is infinite and holy, beyond our conceiving. A god whom you and I could comprehend by the light of our own unaided perceptions—as we comprehend, say, the Solar System or the Binomial Theorem or Mount Everest—would not be God, but an idol; He would not be

the Source, the Ground and the Goal of all existence and all thinking, One who is of necessity beyond all knowledge and all thought. The fact is that God is known to us not as an object, not as 'Him', at all, but as 'Thou'. We do not and we cannot know Him as He is in Himself; but He comes to meet us; He confronts us in Christ with His living Word; He calls us by name, and we do not know anything of Him until, having heard, we make answer with the Psalmist, saying, 'O God, Thou art my God.'

To know God is not to find Him after much clever searching, but to meet Him in Christ. As Bishop Westcott put it, 'the most complete intellectual faith is really the climax of unbelief'. He meant that the knowledge of God is not something that a man can 'work up' by long, long thought; it is not like the perfect familiarity of the sergeant-major with drill regulations, which he almost knows backwards. To know God is rather to be like the humblest private soldier who meets the King himself, and meets him alone; it is to discover with amazement and contrition and joy that 'as is His majesty, so is His mercy'.

If, then, belief can never be the attitude of the spectator, the merely intellectual curiosity of the detached theorist, what is it? In one word, the

answer is commitment. The old phrase, decision for Christ, will never be out of date; it stands for the decision of the will, the personal venture of trust and loyalty. You bet your life—nothing less. ‘We know that ghosts cannot speak until they have drunk blood’, said a great scholar when writing about the dead and vanished culture of the ancient Greeks which was his special study. ‘The spirits which we evoke’, he went on, ‘demand the blood of our hearts.’ That puts it exactly. Christ lives, not in our intellectual assent to truth about Him, but in the life we pour out on His behalf. Unless men give their very life’s blood to Christ, He remains for them a ghost, and the story of the faith is only a venerable and crumbling ruin. You or I have to hear His Word, and not merely to hear about it; a Christian minister is not a historian, but a herald; he is not an essayist stimulating interest in the glory of the past, but an evangelist demanding decision and commitment here and now, and saying, ‘This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. . . . Now is the accepted time.’

Religion is not an academic exercise, like a crossword puzzle or a riddle, awaiting its elucidation and solution. You only understand Christ by loving Him, not by speculating about the mystery of His person. Forgive a personal reference. A little friend

of mine aged twelve once took me for a walk, and I quickly found myself marvelling at her knowledge of wild flowers, a knowledge that sprang out of her love for them all. They were clearly part of her life out in the open air. She knew them all as friends, and though the botanist may call these *Calendula*, to her they were marigolds; though the proper name of these is *Arum*, she called them Lords and Ladies; and I have no doubt that she would have looked surprised if you called *Althea* what she was very fond of as *Hollyhock*. At the end of the walk I asked her, 'When did you learn so much about flowers?' And she, looking puzzled for a moment, said, 'Oh, well, of course, we did Botany in our Junior High, but it's all rot about corollas and things.' She was wrong, of course, and yet splendidly right: and, moreover, she was in line with that concreteness which marks the modern approach to so many of our problems. She meant, quite rightly, that scientific formulæ are only abstractions when compared with the living flower fluttering and dancing in the breeze, and that we only understand living things by living with them. It is 'inside knowledge', as we say. The expert is the person who has committed himself; not one who is making learned observations from the outside; which is perhaps what the Greek philosopher Aris-

totle meant when he said that the best judge of a dinner is not the cook (who, admittedly, knows all about dinners), but the diner.

But someone will ask, perhaps, 'What right have you to believe? Isn't your commitment of yourself in faith a glaring example of what is called wishful-thinking, whereby your emotions run away with you and you believe what you want to believe?' Well, that is not impossible, of course. Only a fool will assume his own infallibility; and the pathway leading to truth is paved with prejudices which sincere people have had to learn to suspect and, finally, to give up. But that is not peculiar to religious people: it is common to men everywhere as beings who, in some sense, have to grow expert by experiment. Indeed, by objecting to this commitment of yourself in faith, you put a great deal of modern science right out of court. For the scientist works by faith all the time he is collecting his facts and sitting down patiently in front of them. His faith (which he certainly cannot prove) that Nature is coherent and intelligible, is the mainspring of his work. A hypothesis such as that of the wave-theory of light, or of the force of gravity, or the general theory of relativity, have all been ventures of faith; the scientist has had to make them in order to get anywhere at all.

It is true, of course, that St. Augustine's famous way of putting this, 'You must believe if you would understand', sounds very provocative to the modern mind which is rightly afraid of being credulous or superstitious. Healthy-minded people know that if faith is ever a soothing drug it is unreservedly bad; and that if a religion were the opium of the masses, it would be as vile as any drug traffic. But bemusing oneself in that way was the last thing that St. Augustine meant by that word Belief! He meant what the disciples of Christ have ever meant by it—namely, commitment to Him as Master and Lord, and learning of Him by personal experience.

The fact is that whether I commit myself to Jesus Christ or not, I cannot escape Him. He will not be ignored. He is more than a fact within the spiritual order which makes man man. He is its climax, its living speech, its last Word. In Him its essential meaning is bodied forth. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines out, indubitably and for ever, from His face. In Him God comes nigh to us in all our felt insufficiency and need; ever since He wore our robe of flesh and strange infirmity He has haunted human life. Across the tumult of the centuries men have not been able to escape Him, much less forget Him. He challenges, draws, subdues men. He speaks with



authority. He has done something to human history, so entering into its very stuff that men meet Him and know Him there either as a Stone of Stumbling or as the Head of the Corner.

Beethoven, you may remember, was once entertaining friends at an inn, when the conversation was interrupted by a loud snore from the coachman, asleep in a corner of the room. Beethoven gazed at him for a few moments and then said, 'I wish I were as stupid as that fellow.' No, that is not the remark of a snob or a superior person. A genius like Beethoven knew something about the agony of commitment; he knew that his art was a mistress who disdained a divided allegiance, and that there could be no half-measures, no polite neutrality, no turning back.

Similarly, the world into which Christ came is your world and mine; He will not be ignored. He haunts to the very end any who have ever met Him, those who have once caught the spell of His invitation and felt the power of His authority. Beethoven's remark meant that to one who has ever taken things seriously there is no respite by taking them less seriously. We are made in such a way that an attitude of neutrality is disallowed here. There is no middle course along which to walk delicately, no razor-edge of indecision on which to hover. We

may follow to the Cross or wag the head and mock. We may cry out in passionate rebellion, 'Not this man but Barabbas.' But one ancient question abides, and it is its own answer: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

CHAPTER VII  
HOW CAN WE KNOW THE WILL  
OF GOD?

I

HE that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. The whole Bible contains no simpler or more moving statement. There is finality in every word.

But what is the will of God, and how are we to know it? To the notorious and age-long difficulty of doing the will of God must be added the difficulty of finding out what it is. It is the will of God that we should do justly and love mercy and walk humbly. But what precisely does this mean in terms of the concrete stuff of our daily living? Universal principles are mere abstractions until they are seen in and through particular facts. Just as Beauty is only a name apart from the beautiful sunset, the beautiful face or the beautiful line; just as Redness has no living reality apart from its particular manifestation in red rubies, red wine or red blood; so, too, the will of God has to be discovered in the

concrete and the particular, in terms of the facts which press upon us in all their urgency and irresolvable complexity. Men were never more acutely aware of this than they are to-day.

What is God's will, here and now, about our bombing aeroplanes, our monetary system, our sex relationships, our tolerance or intolerance of other men's opinions which seem to us not only detestable but very dangerous? To ask these four questions is only to illustrate the difficulty of finding out the right answer (*i.e.*, God's answer) to a multitude of such questions. Such is the relativism of our time that nearly all our questions are open questions; we ask them because we cannot answer them with any confidence.

For example; bombing aeroplanes mean murder most foul; how are wayfaring men everywhere to deal with this evil? Is it God's will that they should arm against their neighbours with faster bombers, doing the Devil's work in the hope that good may come out of Universal Devilry? The conscience of decent people everywhere is divided as to the right answer.

Again; the economic system by which we are dominated is plainly wrong because it inflicts social injustice, if not misery, on multitudes, while it gives to the few the corrupting privilege and power which

go with vast wealth. How is the wrong to be righted? In the face of human selfishness and stupidity, greed and fear, is the way of ruthless violence the only way, as many believe? If not, what is the right way? Men are divided here, too, and all who are at all sensitive to the meaning and difficulty of the problem ask the ancient question: Who will show us any good? Speaking out of his rich and full experience among working men on Tower Hill week by week, Doctor Donald Soper recently remarked that whereas five years ago men were still truculently sure of their respective economic and political dogmas, ideologies and -isms, to-day he detects a new note—a certain hesitation about the familiar catchwords and clichés if not a wistful agnosticism; plenty of good will, but a new sense that man is at the end of his tether unless he can discover what a Christian would call the kingdom and righteousness of God.

Again; what is the will and purpose of God with regard to the imperious desires of these our bodies which He has made? Purity is purity and lust is lust; but when you have said much that ought to be said about the relaxed moral earnestness of these days, you still have to reckon with multitudes who are not sure that much of our conventional sex morality is in accordance with God's eternal pur-

poses for us 'in the body'. How is the seeming tension between biological values and spiritual values to be resolved, if both sets of values are—as we must believe—precious in God's sight?

Once again; what is the will of God about the great and precious principle of tolerance—that freedom of thought and speech to which we were all free-born out of the long travail of the centuries? At what point do 'ideologies' become intolerable? Is it right, in the name of the sacred principle of freedom, to tolerate the growth of ideas which, when powerful enough, may brutally repudiate that very principle of freedom which has made their rise possible? Should Free Churchmen in England, for example, begrudge to Roman Catholics the very religious freedom which they claim for themselves because they rightly fear an ecclesiastical system which refuses, on principle, to repudiate the ghastly story of the Inquisition?

Thus, the modern man is in bondage to the Relativism which announces that nothing under Heaven is absolute and that one thing may well be as good as another. National and international politics remind us daily that opportunism is our only working criterion; with the result that people of precise notions—people, in short, with principles—are often dismissed by us as tedious fanatics, blind and in-



sensitive to the complexity of all human problems. We appreciate the dry remark which Gibbon bestowed on the Whirling Dervishes of the desert: "They mistook the giddiness of the head for the illumination of the Spirit." We feel that it is a neat and effective comment on all cocksureness; it is as annihilating as Cromwell's famous appeal to the Kirk of Scotland: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken."\*

## II

So much for the difficulty. What can we say in reply to it? Indeed,—since this is no academic problem,—what *do* we say? Relativism may content the aesthete, but not living men for whom the urgencies of daily living mean decision and action. In one of his Lay Sermons delivered in Balliol College Chapel, Edward Caird remarked that when all is said and done, we have "truth enough to live by." By this he meant more, presumably, than

\*This paragraph may read strangely, in view of the absolutist ideologies of our time, with their notorious intransigence and ruthlessness. But modern dogmatism in politics and economics is only a vivid expression of the fundamental scepticism to which I am here drawing attention. It is because men cannot live on Relativism, and cannot for ever make the Note of Interrogation their symbol, that they devise their Absolutisms. When we lose faith there is no hope for us. Dictatorships are a crude way of recognizing the fact, an unconscious expression of the profound spiritual malaise of much modern civilization.

Butler meant when he spoke of "probability as the guide to life." There is the leap of faith in Caird's dictum, if by faith we mean something more than intellectual assent to propositions in theology. Faith is always *fiducia* (trust) rather than *assensus*; it is what Karl Heim and other modern German theologians call *Entscheidung*, the god-given decision to live confidently on the promises of God which are declared to men in certain events of human history, and which are Yea and Amen in Jesus Christ. "The heart that remained true to itself never yet found this big Universe finally faithless to it," said Thomas Carlyle. The Christian believer knows that this is true, because for him this big Universe finds its meaning and uttered word—its Last Word, as it were—in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Christ judges and blesses men, not as an argument but as a Fact. Here is no relativist speculation, delicately balancing its *pro* and *contra*, but the mightiest of God's mighty acts of grace.

Human pride resents this appeal to historic fact, of which the Bible is so full. What has recently been called 'the radical realism' of the Bible consists, surely, in the fact that the Bible knows God as the living God, speaking to men in terms of life itself, rather than in terms of metaphysical speculation. The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon

Him. Philosophically considered He is infinitely remote,—the great Unknown—but from the standpoint of religious experience He is dynamically near, mighty to save. This is set out with emphatic clearness in the book of Deuteronomy:

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

But the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it (Deut. xxx, 11-14).

The Christian cannot help knowing that here is the real answer to Job's noble but pathetic cry: "O that I knew where I might find Him. . . . I would order my cause before Him and fill my mouth with arguments". The fact is that we never find God by voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone; argumentation does not bring us to His seat; He comes nigh unto us and finds us by uttering His living Word just where we are. It pleased God to reveal His Son in us; while we were yet sinners Christ died for us; which means that we live by revelation, not by probabilities which we have excogitated. The Word is nigh thee. I have

read somewhere of "a wander-wit of Wiltshire" in the 17th century who travelled to Rome to gaze on the antiquities; and "there screwing himself into the company of antiquarians, they entreated him to illustrate unto them that famous monument in his country, called Stonage (Stonehenge). His answer was that he had never seen, scarce ever heard of it, whereupon they kicked him out of doors and bid him go home and see Stonage."

It is an apt comment, not only on that word of God in the book of Deuteronomy, about probing Heaven itself with the poor little measuring rod of our finite faculties, but also on all our human attempts to prove God's existence, or to know Him by the speculation of the intellect. Intellectual demonstrations of truth about God may or may not be possible; men are divided on the point; what is impossible is that real knowledge of God should come to us in any way other than by God's self-disclosure, in terms that we creatures of time and sense can understand. It is an historic fact that God has spoken to us in His Son. The preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the corporate Life of the Church are proclamations of this Good News.

So much, then, for the fact of Christ, whereby



God utters His judging and redeeming Word to men. The vital question for us is surely this: How does this Word come so nigh to us that it is self-authenticating, authoritative, explicit and compelling? That God has visited and redeemed His people I cannot doubt; but how is this mightiest of His mighty acts of grace to be related to the life which I am called to live in this twentieth century? Just how does God by His Holy Spirit bring Christ down for me, so that I am enabled not only to know the will of God, but also to love it and do it?

## III

This raises the classic question of authority, to which three answers with classic differences of emphasis have been given,—in terms of the Holy Scriptures, the Visible Church and the Inner Light of the individual believer's conscience. Often enough in the history of Christendom these three types of authority have confronted one another like the three duellists in Sheridan's *Critic*, each aware of its logical incompatibility with the other two, and each fighting on two fronts. In fact, however, they interlock. Each needs and relies on the other. The Holy Spirit, which is the sole agent of God's grace, operates in this threefold way, so that the appeal to history (the Bible), the appeal to living tradition

(the Church) and the appeal to conscience (the Inner Light) are one and the same appeal for every believing Christian.

Those Protestants who appeal to the Bible and the Bible alone, are not using the Bible rightly; instead of finding in it the record of the historical revelation of God in Hebrew Nation and Christian Church, they tend to misuse it as a literally inerrant law-book, and so degenerate into Bibliolatry. "The Scriptures," said Luther, "are the cradle wherein Christ is laid", which means that God's Word is uttered to us through the Holy Child rather than through the cradle which contains Him. This is a very different attitude from that of Thomas Cartwright in the late sixteenth century, who defended Deuteronomy xiii, 6ff. by saying, "If this be bloody and extreme, I am content to be so counted with the Holy Ghost."

Those, again, whose ultimate appeal is to the authority, prestige and immemorial tradition of the visible hierarchical church, as the divinely appointed guarantee and vehicle of the redeeming grace of God, are always in danger of thinking of God in terms of the Church, rather than of the Church in terms of God. The implicit logic of such ecclesiastical institutionalism finds explicit statement in the hard Latin doctrine that outside the



(visible) church there is no salvation. Roman Catholicism is the classical form of this deification of tradition, the ruler of the great visible organization of the Church being God's Vicar upon earth. When he speaks *ex cathedra* his pronouncements are infallible.

Again, those mystics of all ages who have stressed the 'inwardness' of religious authority find the Inner Light of intuition and conscience the supreme fact. But the great and notorious danger here is an excessive subjectivism, each man's *Privatmeinungen* claiming absolute authority in the name of divine inspiration; whereupon—to quote Doctor Glover's witticism—"the inner light leads to the outer darkness". The danger to which such mysticism is exposed lies in its loose attitude to history and in its implicit indifference to those outward forms of Book or Institution, Sacrament or Ministry through which God mediates the things of His Spirit. Mysticism always tends to belittle the importance of the factual and the historical. Religion is the meeting of Spirit with spirit in the indissoluble unity of consciousness, but it is a fallacy to suppose that this relationship is so direct and 'immediate' as to make mediation through Bible or Sacrament unnecessary.

Plainly, we all believe in the Inner Light; truth

is not truth for any man until he sees it for himself and makes it his own. He believes that Jesus is the Son of God and his Saviour because the Spirit bears witness in his heart to the truth of what is proclaimed in the Bible and vindicated in the age-long experience of the Church. But without that witness of the Bible and the corroborative testimony of the divine society, how could the fact of Christ have been mediated to him at all? We do not discover what God has done for us on the Cross, *in vacuo*; Christianity is a religion rooted in the stuff of history and its truth is historically mediated even though personally appropriated.

Again, we all believe in the Bible as the Word of God. But a word must be heard and received if its utterance is to have any function and power. This speech of God requires our hearing ear and our glad response. Just as we do not believe that twice two are four because the book of Tables says so, but because we see it for ourselves to be true and are grateful to the Tables for first authoritatively pointing it out; so, unless we can say of the God Whose mind and act are here proclaimed, "O God, Thou art my God," the Bible remains literally a dead letter. Nor can we have for ever or for long this experience of salvation in Christ without the divine society which has made it actual,

and has been its vehicle and guarantee in history.

Again, we all believe in the authority of the Church, in whose womb we have been conceived, at whose bosom we have all been nurtured and by whose discipline we have all been educated. The claim that the Church is an extension of the Incarnation is a just one. But that claim has to be tested and controlled by the witness of the Inner Light in the heart and by the historical witness in the Bible, as to what Jesus was and did. Without the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith would soon become a theologumenon of which the Church or the individual might make what they liked. You have only to observe many practices of present-day Catholicism in Italy, Spain or South America to find yourself asking, "What has this to do with the New Testament?"

#### IV

Our working philosophy of authority, then, is given to us in three truths which interlock as one. We hold up Christ to men as the Jesus of History, as the Living Lord of the Church Evangelical and Catholic, and as the Saviour of personal faith. We have truth enough to live by if we will hear the Word which God the Lord is speaking to us in His Son, in His Church and in His gift of faith.

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Is it not possible to make too much of our difficulties and perplexities? As moral beings, not pieces of automatic clockwork, can we expect things to be easier? Difficulty and victory are correlatives. It is only in a world wherein temptation is a possibility that virtue will be a fact. We walk by faith. To quote a shrewd word from Katherine Mansfield's *Journal*: "The ardent creature spent more than half her time in Church praying to be delivered from temptation. But God grew impatient at last and caused the door to be shut against her. 'For heaven's sake,' He said, 'give the temptation a chance'."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. . . .

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.—Luke xi. 1, 5-9.

THE story from which these words are taken is perplexing, to say the least; yet it is too important a story to be ignored. I invite you to look at it again.

Two friends live in the same village and one knocks the other up in the middle of the night. A guest has arrived unexpectedly and he must have

the honourable reception always given to the traveller in the East. But the host has nothing to offer his guest who has taken him unawares. The night is quiet and dark about him; shops are shut, streets deserted, his own oven long since cold; and anyhow, the need is immediate. At the risk of discourtesy, then, he leaves his guest, runs out into the night, sprints over the dusty road to the house of his fellow-citizen and friend, knocks hurriedly on the door and, to the answering voice from the bed within, shouts breathlessly and a little anxiously: 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine in his journey has come to me and I have nothing to set before him.'

The request was neither unreasonable nor exaggerated. Three little rolls, about which one famous old commentator says: One for my guest, one for me and one over for politeness' sake. If his modest request should be refused by his friend, to whom could the needy man turn in the middle of the night when all were asleep?

But his friend, hardly worthy of that name, did refuse, churlishly and with no politeness. He omits the word friend from his brief and emphatic answer. 'Trouble me not,' he calls, 'the door was long since shut and barred for the night, and I am in bed with my family; I can't get up now and give to you.'



But clearly the difficulties, however real, were not insuperable. It is a small, one-roomed house in which you can carry on a conversation from the family bed with someone in the street. To rise and reach for the bread would have been a small matter. And as for the possibility of thereby waking the children, we may be pretty sure—as a witty French critic puts it—that they were awake already. For there was knocking; and at night, when all sounds are hushed, a knock at a street door is more than usually startling; it comes out of the silence with dramatic abruptness. Think of that knocking in *Macbeth*. Does it not sound importunate and hard as it would not do by day?

So here. The story implies as much, though it gives no details. Indeed, the Latin manuscripts read, 'But he persevered knocking'. That is, he went on knocking and beseeching with obstinate insistence until, in the words of Jesus: I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

There is the story. It is the story of successful importunity. Nor is importunity really a strong enough word. The original Greek means shamelessness, impudence, an obstinate insistence, as though the man gains by clamorous entreaty what

he could not have gained on the score of friendship. Because of his stubborn importunity his prayer is answered, and as many loaves as he wants are handed out to him. He sprints back to his own house and to his guest, leaving the street quiet once more.

If you have thought at all seriously about this story you know that the baffling thing about it is that Jesus adds, 'I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' It is baffling because it seems on the face of it to mean: If a man grants another man's request under these conditions, how much more God. If a man will not resist such persistence indefinitely, neither will God.

Is that the inference we are to make? Are we to assume that prayer means pestering God, keeping on at it shamelessly until our requests are granted? If we dictate to God in conscious defiance of His will, wearing Him out, as it were, by our importunity, battering at the very gates of heaven—is this what Christ commends to us as bound to succeed? Is this the thing He wanted men to learn when they said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray?

You would not thank me if I wasted any time over such a degraded and degrading contention. It is untrue not only to life, but also, stated like this, to

Christ's own mind. He had something to say, you will remember, about those who thought that they would be heard because of their much speaking. That crude conception of prayer as the pestering of God (what old Aloysius Horn called 'this constant nudging of the Almighty'), is surely more akin to magic than to religion. The idea that we can persuade, coerce and ultimately control God is a magical idea; religion means surrender to and communion with God, finding in His will our peace, and in His service perfect freedom. What, then, are we to make of this parable? We cannot just ignore it: if we know anything about religion at all we know that there is something true and inescapable here. Very well, what is it? Let me speak of three things which I learn here, three truths which leave the story not a baffling enigma, but a precious witness to the deepest things by which men live.

The first is a brief and more or less technical point. Ought we not to remember at the outset the fundamental fact that Jesus Christ was, among other things, a poet and an artist. These parables are works of art and they must be approached as such. They are not allegories, every detail of which is meant to have its interpretation. We may not dot the i's and cross the t's, labelling and pigeon-holing and elucidating as though every parable were a

message in code, a puzzle awaiting its key. The dramatic machinery of the story is only machinery and is of secondary importance. We have to see this story as a whole. We have to look at it as we look at, say, a canvas by Rembrandt in the National Gallery. As you know, Rembrandt will darken heavily every part of a head in order that one spot on its brass helmet may stand out brilliantly, may shine like gold. But he does not thereby imply that the wearer of that helmet is a black man. Again, his picture of a sad woman only reveals the dead white of the face below the eyes and the scarf about her neck; nothing else is visible. But you are not to infer that this woman has no ears. You are not looking at an anatomical diagram but at a picture, a picture by a great master. And surely when Christ tells stories which perplex us because of the dark places in them: when in one parable an unjust judge seems to stand for God and in another an unjust steward for a disciple: and when, here, a surly, ill-mannered man points by analogy to God and when, apparently, intercession is likened to begging—ought we not to remember the way of the artist? This is not a diagram setting out the whole anatomy of the religious life, but a picture illustrating one supremely important fact in the religious life. The point is how does this judge *act*? What does this

neighbour, hearing the cry for help, actually *do*? Jesus, being a great teller of stories, does what only great masters can do with power; he deliberately gives to his story colour and high lights against a background uncompromisingly dark; He dares to bring out rightness of action by setting even wrongness of character in vivid contrast. He is painting a picture with importunity as its theme. You can't depict importunity without someone to importune; if there is to be a picture at all, it will give us analogies, not of character, but of action.

Surely the high light in this picture is not those details which are trivial and unedifying enough in themselves; the vital point on which all the light of the picture is focussed, so that it is withdrawn from elsewhere, is that God does hear the importunate cry of man for His care and blessing. If there is a dark shadow in Jesus' picture it is there only to show the ultimate secret of this universe in one luminous detail—bread being given, human need being met by the manna of God's grace.

So much, then, for the way to look at the story. Let us pass in the second place to something more important. This parable says something which we all easily forget. It brings right home to you and me a fact which has to be disturbingly, arrestingly forced upon our notice, since we are so prone to

ignore it. The deep root of all our modern problems is that we do not really believe in God. We may believe half-heartedly in the idea of God, as a hypothesis with which to make sense of our lives, a regulative principle for our thinking. But that is theism; it is belief about God but not yet belief in God, the living God who is known for what He is by what He does in history, and in our history. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere what it is to believe in Providence, Miracle and Prayer. This parable, for example, with its naïve and unphilosophical picture of living communion between God and man, pulls us sophisticated people up with a jerk, does it not? We theorize about religion; we talk about it and about; our attitude is æsthetic. Jesus lived religion. His very language about God reveals that He lived with and in God. His way of telling people about God is amazingly simple, just like this story. He never stops to argue about God; He constructs no elaborate philosophical explanation of those problems which the intellectual belief in God makes so acute. Jesus takes God for granted, quietly, almost casually, just as your children in the nursery take you for granted. Jesus' pictures of the author of this wide universe are astonishingly, even perplexingly, human. (I was just about to use one of those long, grand, subtle words of which the



modern religious vocabulary is so full, and to say that Jesus' pictures of God are so bafflingly 'anthropomorphic', that is, made in the image of man. But Jesus knew nothing and cared nothing, apparently, about the theological speculation implied by a grand word like that. He was completely and profoundly simple in His certainty about God. What He is telling you and me in this story is the terrible and wonderful truth that God is our Neighbour.)

You and I lack that simplicity and depth of faith, and we know it. To Jesus, God was a fact, like the air He breathed or the breakfast He ate. The Sovereign Lord of this universe was His Father and He knew that He had come to mediate this knowledge to needy men and to make its redeeming power operative in their lives. But to us, is not God too often a faltering hypothesis? We speculate, argue, wonder about Him. We do not really believe as we might believe that the chief end of man is to know God and to enjoy Him for ever. Jesus just lived with the Father; He was and is the Son. We spend so much time in these days of disintegration and self-consciousness discussing wistfully whether we are not really orphans, and whether God may not be, after all, only the pathetic product of our imagination. Is there a living God whose judgment and redeeming grace are ever beating in thun-

der about our doors or is this merely a projection of our inward wistful longings, something which we have 'made up', as it were, because we want it so badly, the wish being father to the thought?

You may remember how Thomas Hardy was plagued by the critics for using strange and even new words in his poems. He once looked up a word in the dictionary, lest they might again accuse him of coining, and was amused to find that the word was there right enough, but that the only authority which could be quoted for it was Thomas Hardy in an early and half-forgotten novel. Is our religion no better than a private illusion, finding no authoritative verification outside ourselves, or is there a living God who made all things and who speaks—in mighty acts?

This parable which likens the deepest things in religion to running round the corner to ask help from a neighbour forces you and me to see that argument about religion is not religion, and that discussing God is never the mystery of godliness. Talking about God (do not we ministers and theologians know it!) is not the same thing as knowledge of God. Bacon once said of the Puritans that they tossed up and down the bread of life but broke it not—a remark, incidentally, which is profoundly untrue of the Puritans, about whom, in any case,

Lord Bacon was hardly competent to pass judgment. But how close that criticism comes to us in the modern world. There is so much of what John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist, called 'this hovering and fluttering up and down about Divinity'. To-day there is so much intellectual anxiety about the problems of religion. And, of course, the problems are notorious enough; far be it from me to belittle them; they will always be important because they will always be inescapable. But you can know God only by going down on your knees, not by arguing about Christian evidences; and you can only know the mystery of Christ's person and work by loving Him and surrendering your life to Him. Apart from this, all our argumentation about Him is not religion, but the empty clamour of words, those 'windy attorneys'; barren and jejune speculation between man and man rather than silence and awe before the majesty and comfort of the Word of God; much rattling of milk-cans but little milk; much talk of food values, vitamins and diet analysis, but little living bread into which a man can get his teeth and so sustain his very life. It is all the difference between lingering at home, uncertain whether our neighbour might let us have a loaf to meet our immediate need, and going and getting it from him. It is the difference neatly, if flippantly, expressed in

that story about some good people who went to heaven and found on arrival that there were two different gates through which they might pass. Over the one was written the word 'Heaven' and over the other the words 'Lecture on Heaven'. They all chose the second gate.

This parable is a rebuke to us all. It is the sort of story which brings those who see its meaning to their knees. It is not a bit clever or speculative, nor will it meet your difficulties in a purely intellectual way, but it shows you the One who, to put it no higher, is the Lord of Life and whose mastery of the art of life is complete and unquestioned, quietly knowing God and living in God, the Father who is real and no figment, who knows our necessities because He made us for Himself, who loves us, who feeds us with the things that belong to our peace and will not fail us or send us away empty when we come to Him with the cry of our want and frailty on our lips. Jesus never theorized about religion. This parable, like all His parables, cries out to men to be reconciled to the living God and to be partakers of His proffered blessing.

And now for the final thing that I learn here, final in the sense that it is the dominant truth of the whole matter. The parable turns on the word importunity, the word which is the undoing of

many who read it. What are we to make of it? In a sentence the meaning seems to be that this God and Father of Jesus Christ and of us all can help us only when we go to Him demanding His help. Even God cannot feed you and me with the bread of life unless we go to Him with open mouths. Open thy mouth, He says, and I will fill it. Forcible feeding and freedom cannot go together. But we have such poor appetites for His good things, have we not? We look for the bread that perisheth, but rarely for the bread that cometh down from heaven. And bread from heaven is never forced upon us. Only those who hunger and thirst after God can be filled of God—if man is truly free and if God is truly Love.

And the story of the surly neighbour who holds back for a time, though not edifying in detail, is most certainly edifying as the mirror of an eternal truth. Christian history in all its range and variety is a commentary on what Jesus was here proclaiming. Listen, for example, to Martin Luther on the 118th Psalm. He says: 'Let him learn here who can learn and let everyone also become an eagle that can soar aloft into the heights in such need. The Psalmist said: I cried unto the Lord. Thou must learn to cry. Come now, thou lazy rascal, fall down upon thy knee and set forth thy need with

tears before God.' That is, God can only give His greatest riches when I have realized and confessed my deepest poverty. You can have God's gift of Himself only as you greatly desire it, yearn for it, and pant after it; as you ask, seek, knock,

Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer.

We find this parable difficult because its details are difficult. But see it in terms of the spiritual order to which it points. In that spiritual order you can have only what you desire earnestly. Impor-tunity is the only key which will open the gates of that world. That there is such a world is beyond any question; there are certain realities, spiritual and eternal, which from their very nature you cannot have except you seek them passionately and in-sistently, except you agonize after them—it may have to be with strong crying and tears. God has put the door there—a shut door, we may even dare to call it—not that you may be denied admission, but that by knocking and demanding you may know how glorious and blessed a thing it is to enter in. This is God's way of loving us and training us for Himself. Certain things there are which He will not give to us except and until we ask Him. They are His own good gifts, not to be wasted casually, not to be disparaged by reckless scattering abroad. The Father knoweth what things we need



before we ask Him, but until we do ask, we have shown that we are not ready to receive. In reverence let it be said that only by assault upon Himself can we receive the things He prepares eternally for them that love Him; only by demanding that Christ enter in and have His way with us can He come in to bless us, bringing us at the last to the Beatific Vision.